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JANUARY 2007

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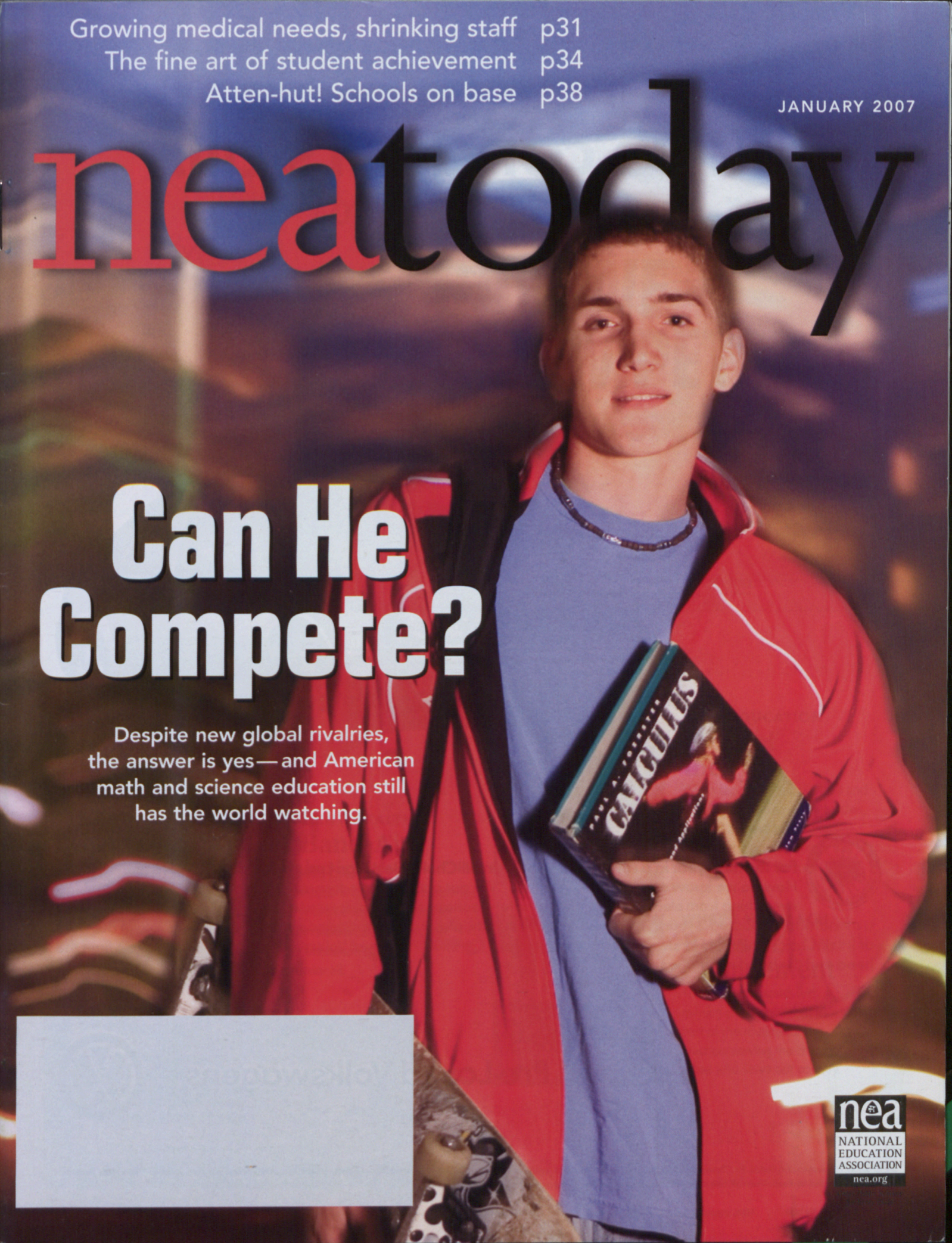
Can He Compete?

Despite new global rivalries, the answer is yes—and American math and science education still has the world watching.



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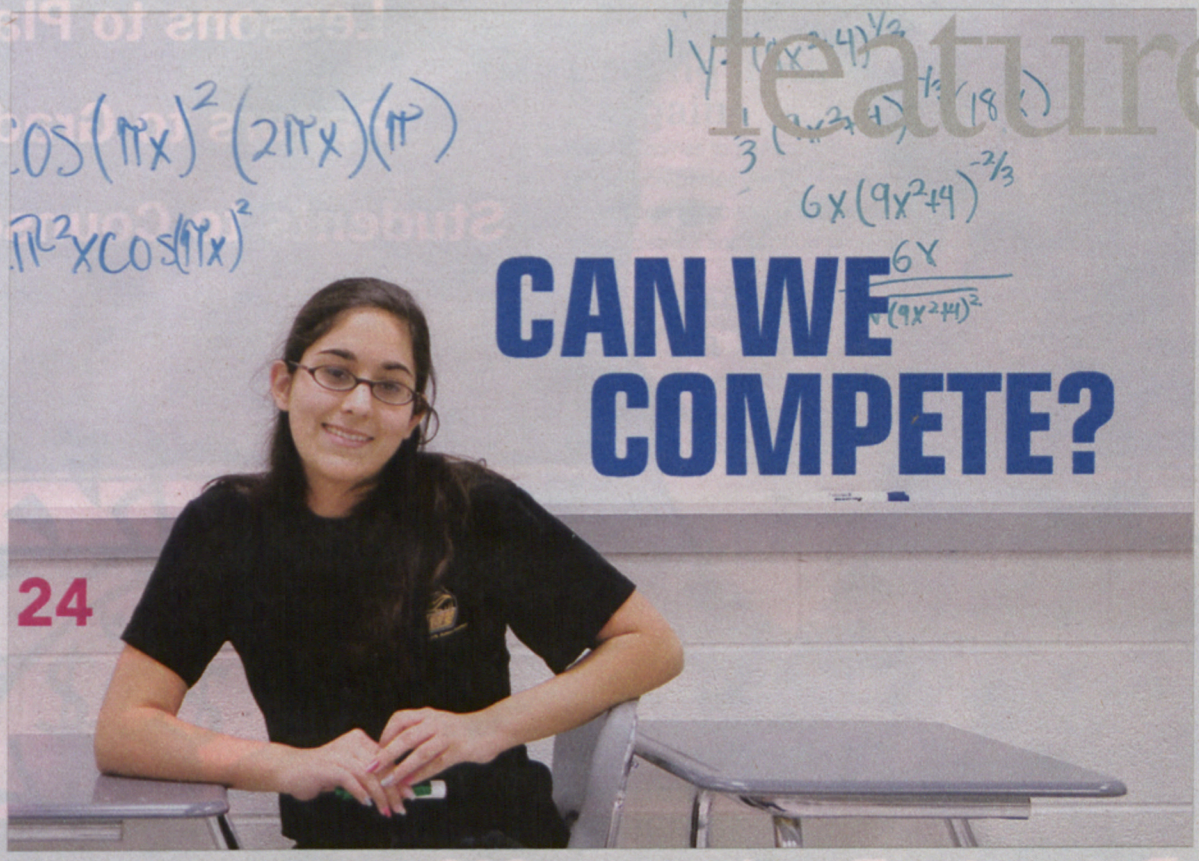

CAN WE COMPETE?

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In the face of new global rivalries come renewed worries about how American math and science education stack up. While we look to emerging giants like China and India, the rest of the world is still watching what U.S. educators do in the classroom.

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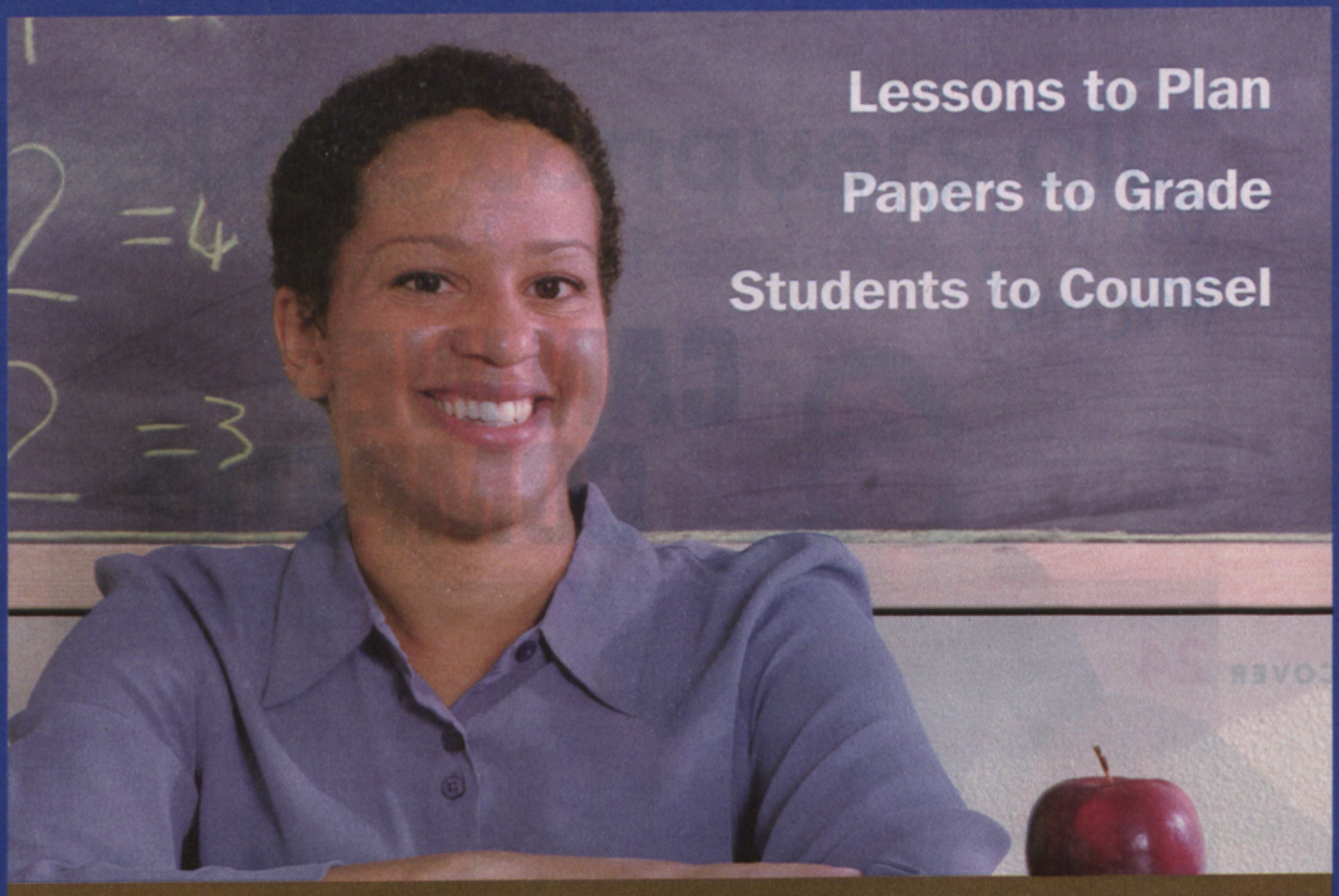
Their morning starts with a military checkpoint, but it's all part of the routine for the teachers serving the children of those who serve our country.

PHOTO TOP: SCOTT SUCHMAN; SMALL PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: JOHN BALLANCE; SEAN CONNELLEY; STEPHANIE BRUCE



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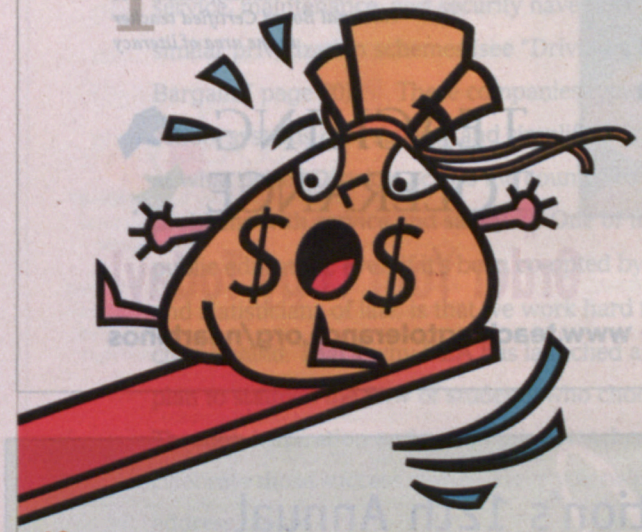

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Taken for a Ride

Donna Mitchner had worked as a bus driver for 15 years when her Michigan district signed a contract with a private transportation company. Mitchner was rehired to do her old job, but the company lowered her hourly salary, slashed her benefits, and drummed her into a union that represented the employer, not its employees. ¶ For-profit companies like Laidlaw International now bus more than 2 million children each year, and public school employees working in food service, maintenance, and security have been pushed into similar privatization schemes (see "Driving a Hard Bargain," page 20). ¶ These companies typically promise school systems cost-savings and simplified operations, but at what price? Districts across the country have reported problems with service and safety. ¶ One of the promises of public education, even if it's been co-opted by politicians and statisticians of late, is that we work hard to leave no child behind. That's why NEA has launched an ambitious plan to staunch the flow of students who choose to drop out of school (see "The Dropout Directive," page 18). ¶ Through inspiration and perspiration, teachers make a difference in would-be dropouts' lives every day, and we'll celebrate those success stories. Have you helped a student stay in school? Share your story with us at the e-mail address below.

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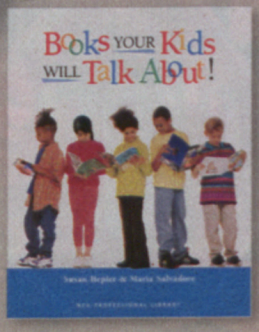

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Great Public Schools for Every Child

Maintaining Our Edge

From *Sputnik* to cyberspace, the key to keeping the United States competitive comes down to quality math and science education.

On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first man-made object to orbit the Earth and beat us into space. The *Sputnik* satellite weighed just 183 pounds, and it only stayed in orbit for three months. But its launch sparked fears that the United States had fallen behind our Cold War rival in science education.

President Eisenhower challenged us to strengthen math and science education and we answered the call. Soon after, Americans walked on the moon. The United States had won the Space Race.

Now it's déjà vu all over again as we face claims that the United States is losing its edge in science and technology. In the years since we landed on the moon, the United States has led the world in the Internet and technology revolution. Yet we must continue to find better methods of teaching science and math as a way to stay competitive in the 21st century global economy.

How do we begin? Start by ensuring that every student has a qualified science and math teacher who knows how to engage young minds. There is a severe shortage of qualified math and science teachers, and public schools will continue to come up short until we raise the earning power of teachers and make a career in the classroom a more attractive option for math and science graduates.

Like any professionals, teachers also need the opportunity to sharpen their skills. National Science Foundation grants for professional development should be expanded, not reduced, as the current Administration's budget proposal would do. And America's teachers should be able to have the kind of professional enrichment that their colleagues around the world already enjoy: time to meet with colleagues, collaborate on lesson plans, and learn more about their field.

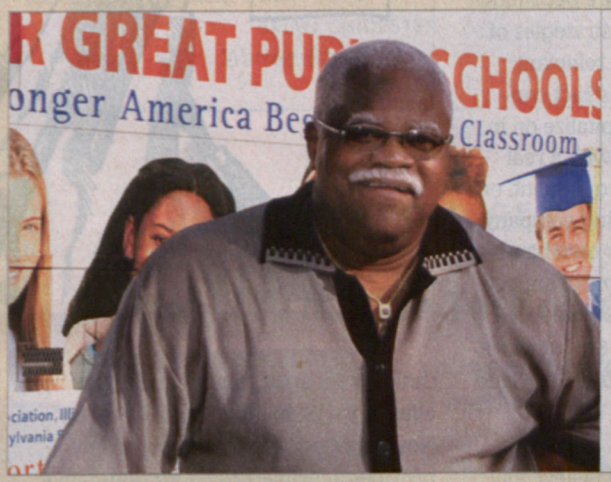
As is often the case in education reform, educators will play a key role, but moving this agenda forward will require shared responsibility. Students must rise to the challenge by taking the most advanced math and science courses available to them.

Fifty percent of college-bound high school seniors have not taken physics or trigonometry and three-quarters will graduate without taking calculus. We cannot afford to let our students glide by without the benefit of gaining these important academic skills.

We also need help from parents, who should insist that their children take courses that prepare them to secure America's role as a world leader in science and technology.

By keeping track of their children's progress and directing them to the right classes, parents can set their children on the track to college as early as elementary school.

Finally, we must break our national obsession with testing, which threatens our ability to teach students how to think for themselves. Our economy has always rewarded innovative thinking, and great public schools have prepared generations of American students to become creative thinkers.



"As is often the case in education reform, educators will play a key role, but moving this agenda forward will require shared responsibility."

—REG WEAVER

Team NEA, we know that the purpose of an education is not to score well on a test—it's to succeed in life. In a recent article about science education, Diane Ravitch of the Hoover Institution wrote, "The relentless pursuit of higher scores has led to a heavy investment in test preparation activities, at the cost of a sound education....Tests are no substitute for a coherent curriculum and well-prepared teachers."

That was true when the Russians launched *Sputnik*. And friends, it's still true today.

Reg Weaver

NEA PRESIDENT REG WEAVER

PHOTO: SANDY SCHAEFFER

Why Money Matters

I have a master's degree and have been teaching for a couple of years. Unfortunately, I will not earn $40,000 until year seven of the current contract.

I spend most of my check, almost $1,000 per month, on child care. I love teaching and I understand that some districts are skirmishing for funds just to stay afloat. However, given the amount of time and effort that I put into my job, I do not feel as though I am fairly compensated.

TAUSHA FRISON
Matteson, Illinois

Yes, I know we work hard and put in extra time, but that is what it means to be a salaried professional. And for most of us, the longer we work, the more secure our job becomes. Teachers also probably get paid less because we receive benefits not available in any other profession. We know our work has meaning. We don't make junk people don't need, sell them stuff they can't afford. We work with kids and with other people who believe we are making the world a better place.

WES SANDERS
Walla Walla, Washington

Your cover story ("Money Matters," November) was a welcome recognition of the difficult dilemma so many educators face: fulfill our passion for teaching or get paid what we deserve. However, a large number of educators are becoming "teachers in business." Our strategies of lesson planning, instructing reluctant learners, and connecting abstract concepts are perfect skills to capitalize on in the business world. Armed with a real estate license, videography equipment, or a reputable network marketing company, we can take matters into our own hands without sacrificing our dreams of impacting the lives of so many young people.

BOB JENKINS
Columbia, Maryland

LANGUAGE ARTS

I am an Italian teacher, and I believe that knowing as many languages as possible can only enhance your life. Bilingual education ("Something To Talk About," November) is a great idea, but it only provides a further crutch for non-native English speakers. When my mother came to this country, there was no such thing as an ESL class. She managed to teach her parents English as she learned it. She speaks flawless English and maintains her native Italian language. I am sure that modern-day bilingual educators would marvel at her success.

MATTHEW DRUCKER
Long Island, New York

TALK ABOUT IT

Educators are promoters of knowledge; however, the article "It's There: Talk About It" (November) promotes a myth—that "race and poverty don't need to be the elephants in the classroom." I agree education can help conquer poverty; however, that is not the real issue. "Race" is folklore, a made-up word to divide and separate us. Students are not in need, different, or diverse because of "race"; they are in need, different, and diverse because

CYBER-COMMENTARY

TO SUSPEND...

[It] is unfortunate, yet required, that students be suspended for inappropriate dress. I actively support individual freedoms and rights, yet the dress issue has evolved into something completely different. Typically, the person violating such a policy is wearing clothing [to elicit] responses from fellow classmates. Students need to learn self-control and personal management, and a dress code can help do that.

OR NOT SUSPEND?

Suspending students for dress code is going overboard. The consequence I'd implement would be to call the parents and have them bring some decent clothing for their children to wear. Sending them home is actually hurting the educational system as well as the students.

—From the nea.org discussion boards

WANT TO WEIGH IN?
Chat with your colleagues on NEA's discussion boards at **www.nea.org/debate**.

they come to us as individuals with different interests, home lives, and strengths.

JESSE BLUMA
Monarch Beach, California

GETTING PHYSICAL

"Where is Art?" (Upfront, November) addressed the concerns over programs in this area being lost due to No Child Left Behind. But what about physical education? Programs across the country are being lost and administrators are allowing online coursework to be substituted for PE because of tight schedules brought about by NCLB and high-stakes testing. Online programs threaten to completely wipe out PE altogether at the high school level. We need help, too!

JODI PALMER
Columbus, Ohio

A MATTER OF RESPECT

The Harris Poll bar graph (Upfront, November) depicting what specific jobs hold "great prestige" left out nurses at 55 percent (just behind doctors at 58 percent). The public respects nurses right alongside teachers, doctors, and firefighters. Parents should know that many schools do not even have a school nurse and that solutions to school funding such as the "65 Percent" plan would likely eliminate school nurses altogether.

JANALEE STOCK, RN
The Plains, Ohio

HIDDEN MESSAGE?

I thought the [gaming-themed] cover of the October issue about the 2006 elections ("Play to Win!") was quite apt. Just like the addict sacrificing friends, family, and career for that vain obsession, hoping for the big win that never comes, unions keep throwing all their money away on useless politicians, usually of the Democratic variety. We need to state our position and force the politicians to follow our lead, not the other way around. This means political independence from the mainstream parties—not dragging ourselves back to the Democratic bookie for that one last lucky bet....

BRIAN CHIDESTER
Warren, Rhode Island

CLEANING UP

Thank you for [the] outstanding article on custodial duties ("Last Bell," October). Many people do not realize that we are not robots who automatically do their cleaning every day. Last week, I wore a pedometer to work—it registered 16,281 steps at the end of the night. How many steps did you walk on your job today? What if no one wanted to do our jobs?

SANDY DAVIDSON
Freedom, New York

LET'S TALK

Share your ideas, comments, and opinions with *NEA Today* in one of four ways:

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MEMBER IN THE NEWS

"IT WOULD ONLY BE FAIR FOR STUDENTS to have teachers in the classroom that look like them. Students need role models and people to model for them. [Teachers of color] need to know that they are needed in the suburbs. Districts are going to have to go get them."

—BURNSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER JUDY HENDERSON
Pioneer Press, *(St. Paul) November 18, 2006*

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No More Homework?

THE LATEST ASSIGNMENT for teachers: Figuring out whether homework is a good thing. The question has returned to prime time recently, as complaints from parents about homework loads grow. Whether you believe homework is scourge or sound practice, you can join in on the debate.

Education critic Alfie Kohn's new book, *The Homework Myth,* gives good grades to those of us who don't pile on the take-home assignments. Homework is mostly useless, frequently harmful, and rarely a good idea, he says. Teachers should say no to routine homework assignments and save them for special occasions. (For more, see page 17.)

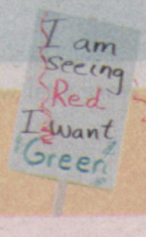
On the other hand, if you think homework is a must-do, you'll still find plenty of support—so long as you keep the load moderate. Duke University homework guru Harris Cooper still recommends the (NEA-endorsed) 10 minutes per grade rule, which he first heard from a teacher. With that, a first-grader gets 10 minutes, while a high school freshman could toil at home for up to 90 minutes.

Cooper and Kohn agree the daily serving for small children—6- to 8-year-olds—has been growing, despite scant evidence that elementary homework does any good. From 1981 to 2002, the proportion of young children reporting homework on any given day climbed from 34 to 64 percent.

Many teachers assign it in the early grades to teach good work habits, Cooper says, which he agrees makes sense. (Kohn insists elementary-age homework just makes kids hate school.)

WHAT DO YOU THINK? Speak your mind at www.neatoday.org. Also visit the site for Cooper's advice on what kind of homework—and how much—to assign.

12 AND THEN THERE WERE EIGHT...



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BOY WITH BOOKS ON DESK: IMAGE SOURCE

An Orbit of Confusion

WHEN A STUDENT IN A PANAMA CITY, FLORIDA, ELEMENTARY SCHOOL HEARD THE BAD NEWS ABOUT PLUTO, SHE RUSHED TO DISTRIBUTE A PETITION AMONG HER CLASSMATES TO GET THE TINY FORMER PLANET REINSTATED AS THE NINTH FROM THE SUN.

IT DIDN'T WORK. But her reaction is typical of many students who were downright dismayed when the International Astronomical Union recently decided to strip Pluto of its full planetary privileges and call it a mere "dwarf planet" instead. Snip went the scissors, as teachers all over the country trimmed their planetary models.

Nonetheless, even as textbooks immediately became outdated and students quickly became confused, teachers took the change in the planetary pecking order in stride.

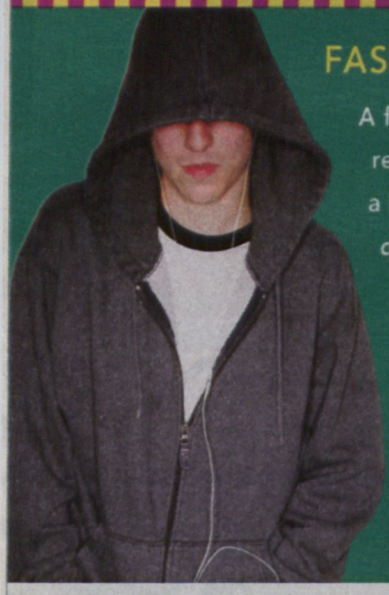
"It's easy with the [youngest students] because I just don't tell them about Pluto. With the older kids, I tell them how it changed," says Becky Peltonen, who teaches at Oscar Patterson Elementary, home of the young pro-Pluto petitioner.

Such is the nature of science, adds Bill Safranek, a high school teacher in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, who explains, "Science is ever-changing—especially in astronomy, where new discoveries are made every day."

And his students are equally adaptable. "Call it what you want," one says. "It's still Pluto. It's still there."

—MISHRI SOMESHWAR

SECRET WEAPON?



FASHION POLICE(D)

A few decades ago, it was Benetton sweaters. Today, the required wear for with-it teenagers is a "hoodie." (That's a hooded sweatshirt to you and me.) But the uniform *de rigueur* is a fashion pitfall in school districts from California to Massachusetts, which have been taking steps to ban them from campuses. School officials believe it's much easier for students to evade security cameras or hall monitors and make an anonymous exit from school if they can pull a hood over their face. Non-students can also blend in more easily.

HAND HOLDING SCISSORS: GEORGE DOYLE; PLUTO: CORBIS; MAN IN HOODIE: CORBIS

At the Head of the Class

IS THE KID WHO STANDS TALLER than his classmates more likely to call himself "Doctor" someday? A Swedish researcher thinks so. In a study of nearly 1 million Swedish men, researcher Finn Rasmussen of the Karolinska Institute has found that men taller than 6-foot-4 are two to three times more likely to go on to higher education. Rasmussen, who announced his results last year, speculated it may have something to do with people's (smaller) expectations for short men.

[STATISTIC]
The percentage of American **9-YEAR-OLDS** who say they spend more than **TWO HOURS** a day on homework.

SOURCE: EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICE

When the Weather Outside is Frightful

BEARPAW AND BEAVERTAIL aren't characters from the latest wacky cartoon, but they soon might enter your kids' vocabularies. Both are terms from snowshoeing, a sport rapidly gaining popularity as a teaching tool.

Snowshoeing is safe, cheap, and easy enough for kindergartners to do, but burns twice as many calories as walking. Plus, students absolutely love it, says physical education teacher Mia Pangburn. In her northeast corner of Maine near the Canadian border, kids actually put the shoes on their lists for Santa. And, during the long winters, "it gets kids outside moving and decreases cabin fever," she says.

But snowshoes can teach more than fitness. In its standards-based curriculum, the nonprofit organization WinterKids (www.winterkids.org) incorporates stamping and striding into science, math, and art lessons like "Winter Ecology-Animal Adaptations" and "Moving Mathematics."

So let it snow, let it snow, let it snow....

—NORA SHALAWAY

Notepad

A New Congress

Pro-education candidates claimed big victories in the 2006 mid-term elections, while the latest political scourge to public education—the so-called "65 Percent Solution" and its equally deceptive partner, the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR), were roundly rejected by voters across the country. (All with the help of NEA's members, of course!)

In Colorado, two "65 percent" ballot proposals, which would have required that two-thirds of education funding be spent in the classroom, cutting out libraries, nurses, custodians, and more, failed with just 38 percent of the vote. In Maine, Nebraska, and Oregon, voters also rejected TABOR, a door-opener for privatization.

At the national level, 14 of 15 Senate candidates recommended by NEA won, as did 72 percent of House candidates in targeted races, as Democrats took control of both. One of the losers? Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, who earned an F on NEA's most recent scorecard. Four new governors, including Ohio's Ted Strickland and Iowa's Chet Culver, are current or former NEA members.

"Now the task is to make sure lawmakers make good on campaign promises," NEA President Reg Weaver said.

Have a great idea?

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RULER: RYAN MCVAY; BOYS BACK TO BACK: RUBBERBALL; SNOWSHOERS: RYAN MCVAY

For Respect! For Dignity!

Imagine this: You wake with a raging fever and can't bear the thought of dragging your sick body into the classroom, cafeteria, or school bus, but your supervisor requires you to get a doctor's note before you can take a day off.

THIS IS THE KIND of unprofessional treatment that education support professionals (ESPs) in Clover Park, Washington, faced this year. No respect. No fairness. And no money! In recent negotiations, the superintendent's team offered no salary raise beyond the mandatory cost-of-living increase and, in addition to the doctor's note provision, said there would be no more extra bus runs for drivers, and health benefits would be cut, too. (Meanwhile, the superintendent jaunted around the country on tax money—to the tune of $55,000 last year—and the district boasts of a $13 million reserve fund.)

With that kind of management attitude, it's no surprise Clover Park ESPs fought back. At an October school board rally, more than 200 showed up—fully half of the total membership. They ran out of pizza, picket signs, and pins, but definitely not passion.

"This is about respect and dignity," Irene Oda, president of the ESP of Clover Park, told school board members.

Not long after the meeting, Oda and friends won—a raise of nearly 4 percent this year, plus more money for health benefits. And the idea of doctor notes? Management was cured of that.

Clover Park ESPs hit the pavement after 67 hours of fruitless negotiations.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT

BEST EXCUSE EVER!

AFTER 22 YEARS in the classroom, Florida middle school teacher Brenda Dannewitz has heard more than her share of creative homework excuses. But this one must be the best: A raccoon had it. As her student explained, a sizable raccoon and its babies had crashed through a ceiling in her house the night before her homework was due and took refuge in her bedroom. Animal control officers set a trap and, of course, told her to stay out. But the homework remained trapped with the raccoon. The student admitted to the *St. Petersburg Times* that it was an unlikely excuse. "I kind of thought it'd be hard to believe, too."

PICKETERS: WEA/NEA, RACCOON: SIEDE PREIS

PUBLIC SCHOOLS RULE

NOT JUST FREE, BUT BETTER!

No less an authority on private enterprise than *The Wall Street Journal* has reported parents are increasingly turning their backs on high-priced private schools for a reliable and inexpensive option: You.

Nationally, educators report a growing switch from private to public schools, particularly in well-to-do areas. Admissions inquiries to the National Association of Independent Schools network declined from 9.7 inquiries per enrollee in 1997 to 8.5 last year.

The reasons may be varied: Private school tuitions are up (16 percent in five years to a median of $16,970 last year); some elite colleges are accepting more public school students, especially those with lots of Advanced Placement; and recent studies suggest that students in private schools don't do any better than their public school counterparts.

18

[STATISTIC]
The percentage of **FOURTH-GRADERS** who say they spend more than **SIX HOURS** a day watching television.

SOURCE: NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

A Portrait of Insanity

AFTER 28 YEARS of teaching, and just as many spectacular reviews, a North Dallas art teacher might be out of a job because she took her fifth-graders on a field trip to, of all places, an art museum! That museum, the Dallas Museum of Art, the host of such events as "Van Gogh Family Day," is home to a handful of nude statues, including a 2,300-year-old Greek funerary relief.

Although Sydney McGee's principal gave formal approval to her plans, and McGee was joined on the outing by four other teachers, a dozen parents, and a museum docent, her principal responded to a parent's complaint about the nude statuary by suspending McGee and immediately interviewing for her replacement. The Texas State Teachers Association and its legal team sprang into action on McGee's behalf and won a rare buyout for McGee in November, requiring the district to pay her through May 2007.

SHREDDER: STOCKBYTE; PHOTO OF MICHELANGELO'S DAVID: NICHOLAS PITT; MAPLE LEAF: GEORGE DIEBOLD

Capitol Report

Academic Freedom

Last year, with the swoop of a pen, then-Florida Gov. Jeb Bush effectively ended years of research by Florida academics in Cuba, including conservation efforts to protect biodiversity on reefs, and data collection on climate change, oil spills, and agricultural productivity.

The state's new law bans faculty from teaching or conducting research in so-called "terrorist states," establishing a dangerous precedent, says University of Florida professor Tom Auxter, president of the United Faculty of Florida.

"Imagine a state where people do not want to know what is currently happening in the countries that concern them most," Auxter said. "[We're] digging our academic grave with this legislation."

Defending Diversity

In two current U.S. Supreme Court cases involving constitutional challenges to voluntary, race-conscious student assignment plans, NEA filed briefs in October that support the school districts.

"These districts are pushing forward and striving for more equitable and diverse schools," says NEA President Reg Weaver.

The Court was expected to hear arguments in the cases in December, but a decision won't be made until later this year.

Want to share a story?

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Were You Well-Taught?

FIRST 5 YEARS

EDUCATION SCHOOLS in America's universities need major makeovers in teacher preparation, says Arthur Levine, former president of Columbia University's Teachers College and author of the recent report *Educating School Teachers*. Too many universities focus on the quantity, rather than quality, of graduates, Levine says, and their students miss out on practical preparation.

An exception are schools accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), Levine adds, which account for about two-thirds of the nation's new teachers. But NCATE accreditation is voluntary, and Levine also called for a new system of professional accountability.

NEA President Reg Weaver would rather see more schools participate in NCATE, he says, and he points out that accreditation isn't the sole solution to educating and keeping new teachers. "With new teachers leaving the profession at such a rapid rate, we must invest more time, money, and resources, not only in teacher preparation, but in recruitment and retention efforts as well," he says.

—NATALIE MCGILL

VITAL STATS

TIME ON TASK

FEELING OVERWORKED? Compared to your colleagues around the world, you are. At every level, American teachers spend more hours teaching. Take a look at **ANNUAL NET TEACHING TIME** for middle-school teachers:

Japan: 534 hours | Denmark: 640 hours | Australia: 809 hours

Mexico: 1,047 hours | **United States: 1,080 hours**

SOURCE: ORGANIZATION FOR ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

DROPOUT PREVENTION

HOW YOU MADE A DIFFERENCE

Have you stepped in when a student was stumbling on the road to graduation?

DO YOU THINK YOU'VE MADE A DIFFERENCE IN DROPOUT PREVENTION?

NEA Today wants to hear your stories and personal experiences with would-be dropouts—who they were and how you helped them stay in school. Please send them to neatoday-reply@list.nea.org.

"They can bring carrots....A birthday

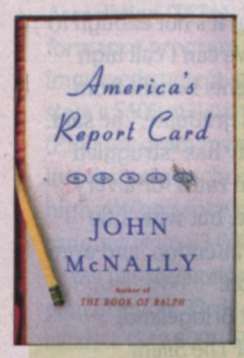
—**Laura Ott,** assistant to the superintendent of California's

GRADUATE: JACK HOLLINGSWORTH; STUDENT ILLUSTRATION: PHOTODISC

BOOK FOCUS

Please tell us it's all fiction

Early in his writing career, novelist John McNally took a turn as a standardized test-scorer in Iowa City, working his way through thousands of test essays. If his latest fiction book, *America's Report Card* (Free Press), is any clue, the experience must have been terrifying. In the novel, our hero takes a temporary job doing the same work—"All morning long, Charlie couldn't concentrate on his scoring, so he gave each essay a 'three.' Amazingly, his reliability and speed both soared." But the novel wanders into more nefarious (and sometimes over-the-top) conspiracy plots—is it possible that the federal government targeted an art teacher who hates the No Child Left Behind law? Could these high-stakes tests really be psychological profiles used by the government for shady purposes? Read on for the answers, or at least a few laughs.



[STATISTIC]

The percentage of **SCOTTISH** fourth-graders who say they spend at least **TWO HOURS** a day on homework.

SOURCE: EDUCATIONAL TESTING SERVICE

Q&A

QUESTIONS FOR **Alfie Kohn**

THE HOMEWORK MYTH

Alfie Kohn is one of the most provocative people writing about education today. In his latest book, *The Homework Myth* (Da Capo), he takes up the cudgels against a mainstay of modern school life. Kohn recently spoke with *NEA Today's* Alain Jehlen.

What is the "homework myth"?

Kohn: Most parents are familiar with the downside of homework: the exhaustion, the family conflicts, and the possibility that kids' interest in learning is eroded by these unending assignments. But we all assume it's worth it, because homework will deepen their understanding [and] teach them good study skills.

It just ain't so. No research has ever demonstrated any academic benefit of giving homework in elementary school. None. Even in high school, where there's a correlation between measures of achievement and homework, that correlation is weak, and it doesn't prove homework was responsible for the higher achievement. Finally, the idea that homework teaches good work habits is an urban myth. Except that it's also accepted in the suburbs.

Many people will say, "That's ridiculous. Practice makes perfect."

Kohn: That's a good example of how folk wisdom, rather than data, is driving our educational practices. It's true you need to practice a lot to be good in tennis, [but] what needs to be proved is that understanding mathematical principles is analogous to tennis.

Practice tends to produce mindless responses. We need to help kids understand ideas, not develop automatic responses.

Don't some things need to be memorized?

Kohn: Well, even if it were true that kids had to memorize the multiplication table, that leaves 99.9 percent of math homework unjustified. Secondly, you don't tend to remember the things that you crammed into memory by rote. You remember what you use. My word processor has far more commands than I'll ever use. But if I sat down with flashcards and tried to learn what Control+Alt+S does, it would be largely unsuccessful. The ones I use a lot, I keep with me. The same is true for math.

Is any kind of homework useful?

Kohn: I don't say there should never be any homework. What I say is, change the default: No homework except on those occasions when the teacher can make a good case that a given assignment is likely to be beneficial. It might be something that has to be done at home, like interviewing one's parents about family history. Or free reading.

Visit **www.neatoday.org** for an extended version of this interview.

doesn't have to be associated with food."

Saddleback Valley Unified School District, about new restrictions on cupcakes and other non-nutritious snacks in classrooms. *Los Angeles Times*, Sept. 27, 2006.

The Dropout Directive

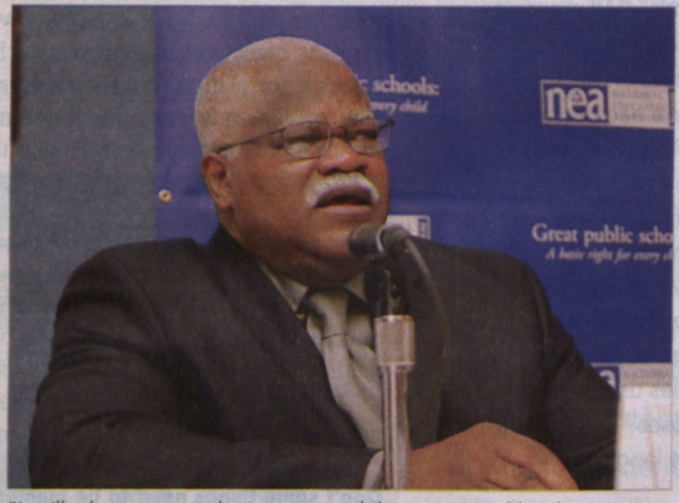
How NEA plans to end the 'silent epidemic.'

Let's make a high school diploma or its equivalent mandatory for all students below the age of 21. That dramatic proposal is at the top of a 12-point plan to address the nation's school dropout crisis that NEA President Reg Weaver unveiled at a packed Washington, D.C., press conference in the fall.

"Just as we established compulsory attendance to the age of 16 or 17 at the beginning of the 20th century, we must now eradicate the idea of 'dropping out' before you achieve your diploma," said Weaver.

As many as half of Black and Hispanic students leave school without a diploma, along with roughly a quarter of their White and Asian-American counterparts.

Along with the compulsory attendance proposal, the other 11 points in NEA's plan involve strategies that have already been tested and proven, ranging from high-quality, universal preschool to special high school graduation centers for older students who didn't graduate with their class and feel uncomfortable staying in school with younger students. The plan also emphasizes involving parents, clergy, businesses, and the entire community. (See www.nea.org/presscenter/actionplan1.html for the complete list.)



"It will take everyone sharing responsibility to correct [the dropout crisis]," said NEA President **Reg Weaver.** Groups and individuals such as the NAACP, National PTA, Rep. Rubén Hinojosa (D-TX), and Verizon have lent their support to Weaver's call.

Since the plan was announced, Weaver's call has been echoed by parent groups, business leaders, and organizations including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC), ASPIRA, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), the National Association for the Education and Advancement of Cambodian, Laotian, and Vietnamese Americans (NAFEA), and the Japanese American Citizens League (JACL). "The NEA plan presents innovative and forward-thinking methods of connecting students with post-secondary options for personal growth, development, and economic security," said Bruce S. Gordon, NAACP's president and CEO, adding that the plan ensures "that educators have the training, tools, and resources needed to provide a high-quality education and prevent students from dropping out."

National Parent Teacher Association President-elect Jan Harp Domene considers the dropout rate a personal matter. When she was 16, her parents asked her to quit school and get a job. "If it were not for a teacher and a YMCA leader, I probably would have done that," she said. She pledged that her organization would tackle the seventh item on NEA's agenda: "Involve families in students' learning at school and at home."

Kathryn Brown, senior vice president of Verizon, said her company has trouble finding people with the high school-level skills needed to be effective at customer support, and she believed NEA's plan would help solve that problem.

Rep. Rubén Hinojosa (D-TX) warned that it's not enough to raise academic standards in high school. "We can't call high school reform successful if only half of students benefit from increased rigor because the other half don't graduate," he said. Hinojosa added that the Hispanic community has "struggled with high dropout rates, and low graduation rates for a very long time, but with little national attention, and even less action."

John Bridgeland, author of *The Silent Epidemic*, a study of dropouts, said there are signs that students are dropping out earlier in their high school careers and credited NEA's initiative for addressing the dropout issue through early and sustained intervention. Some observers have said districts may be encouraging struggling students to leave so their low scores won't count in the annual No Child Left Behind Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) reporting.

NEA is working with pro-public education members of the House and Senate to introduce elements of the plan in the next Congress. Weaver cites studies suggesting that dropping out of high school undermines a student's earning ability and makes students more likely to go to jail and less likely to vote. That means everyone in society pays the price when students drop out, he said. "This is no longer about students slipping through the cracks of our educational system. Those cracks are now craters," said Weaver. "It will take everyone sharing responsibility to correct it."

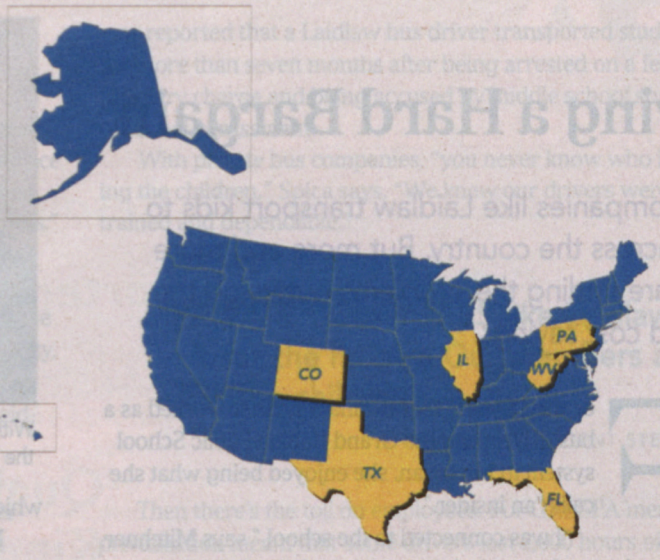
—ALAIN JEHLEN

FOR MORE INFORMATION and resources, including actions that educators, parents, policymakers, and businesspeople can take to reduce the dropout rate now, visit www.nea.org/presscenter/actionplan.html.

PHOTO: CHARLES VOTAW

Teachers Pass on Bonuses

TEXAS More than two dozen Texas schools have rejected state grants to set up a merit pay program for teachers. Although the vast majority of the 1,161 schools awarded grants are expected to accept bonus funds this year, teacher resistance to the idea remains strong. "The premise that teachers are not working as hard as they can and bonuses will make them work harder is just false," says Donna New Haschke, president of the **Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA).** "The pay-for-performance program will not result in improved student achievement." The state's $100 million pay-for-performance (PFP) program rewards teachers at lower-income schools that have received high performance ratings with bonuses ranging from $3,000 to $10,000. Though Texas has the nation's best-funded PFP plan, it ranks 33rd in average teacher salaries ($42,000). The national average is $47,808.



Co-pay Offsets Pay Hike

PENNSYLVANIA The 100-plus secretaries and health aides belonging to the **Dubois Area ESP Association (DAESPA)** have not had a wage increase in four years. The district is now offering a starting wage of $9.50 per hour for secretaries and $10.50 for health aides, but only if they accept a $4,000 health insurance co-pay. "The insurance payment completely eliminates any improvement," says UniServ representative Terra Begolly. "In fact, people would actually earn less than they do right now." Currently, starting pay is $5.70 in three education support professional categories and $7 for secretaries. The group has no salary schedule or structured route to a top pay rate. DAESPA has recently organized a living wage campaign with the help of the **Pennsylvania State Education Association.**

Survey Results Up Membership

COLORADO When the **Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA)** conducted its first "work life" survey in the state's largest school district, officials uncovered a startling degree of discontent. When asked to agree or disagree with the statement, "In general, the school district is headed in the right direction," nearly half of the 1,780 respondents disagreed. Almost 84 percent also disagreed with the statement: "The increase in my workload has had a positive impact on student learning." The revelations in the 5,000-teacher, 90,000-student district produced another surprise. Following the survey, Association membership shot up from 3,800 to 4,100. "As we visit buildings, our members thank us for reading their minds and for taking action," says JCEA President Nancy Henderson. "This is a wake-up call, and we urge the district to work with us to find solutions." JCEA is now developing a campaign called "It's OK to be an Advocate!"

Graduate Employees Unionize

ILLINOIS **Graduate Assistants United Illinois Education Association,** based at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC), wound up an 18-month-long organizing campaign last fall with a strong vote to unionize. Organizers learned that graduate assistants were concerned about onerous fee increases, as well as stipends and basic benefits that lagged behind peer institutions. The effort follows the growing national trend to organize "contingent academic labor," which includes graduate teaching assistants, part-time faculty, adjuncts, and full-time faculty hired on a temporary basis. **The Illinois Education Association-NEA** has represented nearly 700 SIUC tenure-line faculty since 1996 and more than 450 civil service professionals dating back to the 1970s.

Salary Campaign Underway

WEST VIRGINIA With the Mountain State ranked 47th in the nation for salaries and wages, the **West Virginia Education Association (WVEA)** launched a salary campaign seeking a 6 percent salary increase for each of the next two years for teachers, education support professionals, and higher education employees. "Many of our school systems have vacancies that can't be filled by fully certified people," says WVEA President Charlie Delauder. "And our college graduates who have chosen education as a career are leaving the state to find higher-paying jobs." West Virginia teachers earn $38,360 on average, more than $9,400 below the national average of $47,808.

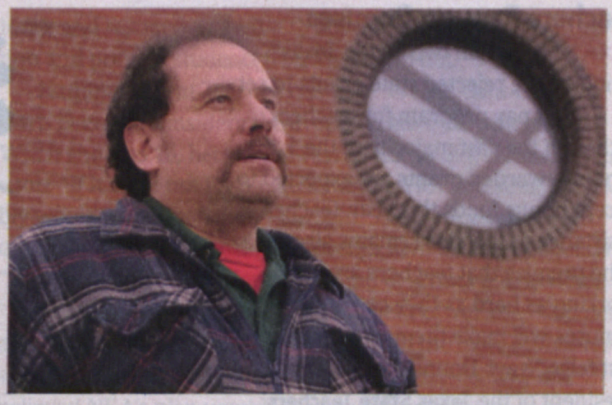
Automatic Salary Increase

FLORIDA A proposed contract negotiated by the **United Teachers of Dade** calls for annual step increases combined with increased salary schedules over the next three years. Salaries for beginning teachers increase from $34,200 to $40,000 during the 2008–09 school year. Veteran teachers top out at $68,225. In addition, school employees will maintain 100 percent employer-funded health insurance.

PHOTOS: PHOTODISC; IMAGE CONSTRUCTION: GROFF CREATIVE INC.

Driving a Hard Bargain

Private companies like Laidlaw transport kids to schools across the country. But more and more districts are finding the problems outweigh the supposed cost savings.



With private bus companies, "you never know who is driving the children," says local president **Steve Spica.**

For the 15 years that Donna Mitchner worked as a bus driver with the Grand Rapids Public School system in Michigan, she enjoyed being what she calls "an insider."

"I was connected to the school," says Mitchner. "I knew the teachers, administrators, the kids, their parents, the security people—everybody it took to [help me] do my job."

That changed in June 2005, when a private bus company hired by the school board took control of district transportation services. When the contract was signed with Dean Transportation, the district fired approximately 175 workers, who were then rehired by the company to perform their old jobs, though with fewer benefits and for less pay. Even worse, teachers and others began seeing the drivers as private employees, not public workers.

"We're outsiders now," laments Mitchner, who was a steward and longtime member of the Grand Rapids Educational Support Personnel Association (GRESPA). "We don't get the same information anymore from teachers, [for example] on how to deal with a child who has a problem."

From transportation and food service to maintenance and security, a wide variety of private companies are attempting to take over work traditionally performed by school district employees in public schools across the country. NEA opposes privatization because of the threat it poses to quality education, the well-being of students, and accountability of public schools to community members.

Mitchner's experience in Grand Rapids is typical of what happens when a for-profit company takes over school transportation services—one of the fastest-growing areas of privatization. The largest such contractor is Laidlaw International, whose Laidlaw Education Services subsidiary now serves about 1,000 school districts and more than 2 million children each day.

"From my experience with Laidlaw, turnover is high and morale is low," says Karen Mahurin, president of NEA's National Council for Education Support Professionals. She says that along with shortchanging drivers when it comes to pay, sick leave, and job security, Laidlaw doesn't have to follow the same rules as districts in terms of ensuring student safety. "Laidlaw drivers are hired oftentimes without background checks, which school districts are by law bound to do," she says.

Mahurin says that Laidlaw drivers are also often less familiar with local bus routes, neighborhoods, school families, and students. "I have encountered Laidlaw drivers who do not like children," she says matter-of-factly. "I advise those drivers to get another job, because the kids don't like them either, which can cause disciplinary problems, which then becomes a safety issue."

Based in Naperville, Illinois, Laidlaw was founded in 1959 as a freight transport company. From 1984 to 1994, Laidlaw bought more than 100 school bus companies in the United States and Canada. Since 1995, the acquisition of Mayflower Contract Services, National School Bus Service, Charterways Transportation, and Vancom nearly doubled Laidlaw's position in the student transportation market. More than 45,000 employees now operate from 580 locations in 36 states and six Canadian provinces.

"Private companies like Laidlaw are in it to make money," says Steve Spica, GRESPA president. "Our members are in it for the children. Sure, they want to earn a living wage, but they often live in the same school district where they work, vote, and shop."

Laidlaw claims that almost 35 percent of U.S. districts and 70 percent of Canadian school systems have outsourced transportation services. One of Laidlaw's selling points is that its newer fleets are less expensive to run. With over 40,000 buses, Laidlaw claims to offer huge economies of

PHOTO TOP: ADAM BIRD; BOTTOM: ALICE TRUED

scale in addition to staff, overhead, and drivers that can be shared among several districts.

"They always make those claims during the bidding process," says Spica, who has worked in custodial and maintenance services for almost 30 years. "Then costs go up and service quality drops. Superintendents make long-term deals, but then they leave the district and the rest of us are stuck with their mess."

News accounts detail that across the country, Laidlaw has had its share of service problems over the years. In 2003, two incidents involving a child being left aboard a school bus at the end of a route occurred in Hillside, New Jersey. In Bibb County, Georgia, school officials canceled their contract with Laidlaw after the superintendent said, "we just don't believe that Laidlaw has effectively managed the busing system."

Some Laidlaw buses carrying students in Arizona had ongoing safety problems, including broken latches on emergency exits and broken stop arms, according to inspection records and drivers. Some drivers were willing to risk their jobs with Laidlaw to make their concerns public.

Service problems at two high schools in Lincolnwood, Illinois, went up by about 50 percent after Laidlaw took over. Drivers missed stops and left some students stranded, while allowing others to ride seated on the floor of overcrowded buses.

In 2002, children in the Waltham district near Boston were left waiting at bus stops for as long as an hour, according to parents and school officials. One parent told the *Boston Globe* that "every day there is a different driver in the morning, a different [one] in the afternoon. Every day [the school bus driver] comes at a different time and a different way."

In some districts, this track record catches up with Laidlaw. After consistently poor service, the Martin County School Board in Florida ended its three-year relationship with the company. The board's unanimous decision not to extend Laidlaw's three-year, $12 million contract came amid heated controversy about the company's operations and hiring practices. It was reported that a Laidlaw bus driver transported students for more than seven months after being arrested on a felony burglary charge and being accused by middle school students of sexual harassment.

With private bus companies, "you never know who is driving the children," Spica says. "We knew our drivers were well-trained and dependable."

"PRIVATE COMPANIES like Laidlaw are in it for the money. Our members are in it for the children."

—GRESPA PRESIDENT STEVE SPICA

Then there's the toll on employees. For GRESPA members, privatization meant that some drivers lost 2,000 hours of accumulated sick leave and 20 years of seniority, as well as having to switch to a new, lower pay schedule.

Mitchner's hourly salary dropped from $16.39 when she worked for the district to $12.99 when she was rehired by Dean Transportation. Under her new contract, she and other drivers have no life insurance or retirement plan. Their accumulated retirement and pay benefits were frozen.

"I'd be making at least $17 an hour today if the district hadn't privatized," says Mitchner, who was forced to join a so-called "union" organized by Dean. To be rehired, former Grand Rapids drivers had to join the company union or lose the opportunity to work.

"The form to join the union was right there with the job application," Mitchner says. Annual dues for the Dean union are $10. Union representatives are not elected, but appointed by company executives. Mitchner has to drive 40 minutes from Grand Rapids to attend one of the infrequent meetings in Lansing, where Dean is based.

"I knew I had representation with GRESPA," Mitchner says. "Not now. They can just fire you. There's no security with this group."

It turns out, however, that breaking the GRESPA union was against the law. In September, a court ruled that Dean Transportation broke federal labor law when it refused to recognize the previous employees' union, an affiliate of the Michigan Education Association (MEA).

MEA filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board in October 2005 against the private bus company's handling of the drivers. At press time, GRESPA was preparing to bargain a new contract for bus drivers.

—JOHN ROSALES

More ESP stories in this issue:

- Washington ESPs unite for better contract – *Page 14*
- Fighting unfair health insurance co-pays – *Page 19*
- No school nurse? Let the teacher's aide do it – *Page 31*

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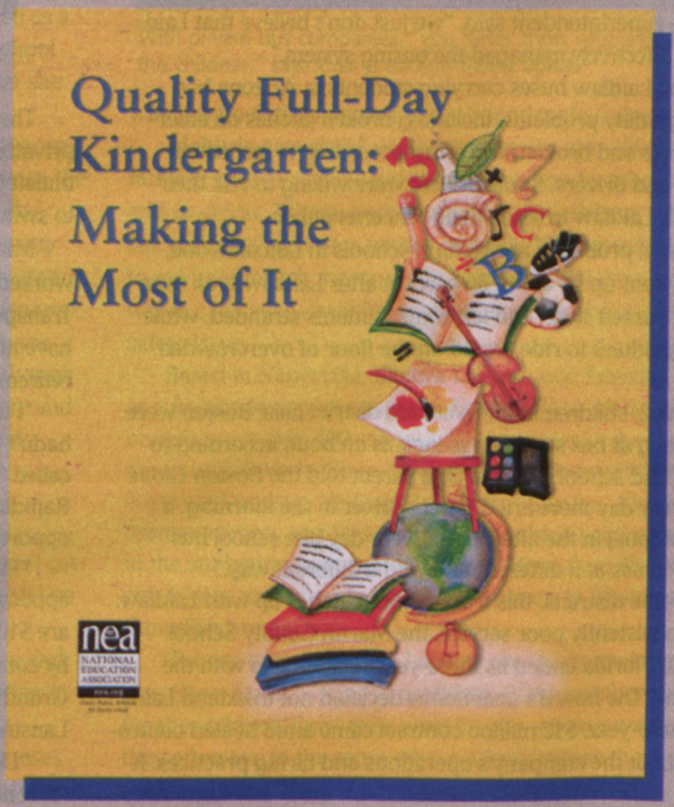

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What's Disruptive?

Courts struggle over controversial teen tees.

It seems like the radical '60s all over again. In unprecedented numbers, students nationwide are taking schools to court for cracking down on controversial T-shirts. Politics, religion, sex, drugs, and guns are just a few of the subjects that have gotten kids into trouble lately.

Some students just want to get attention, but others, like Zach Guiles, set out to make a political statement. While attending an anti-war rally, the Vermont seventh-grader picked up an anti-Bush T-shirt, which he promptly wore to school.

On the front is a picture of Bush wearing an "AWOL" helmet superimposed on the body of a chicken. Emblazoned across the top are the words "Chicken-Hawk-In-Chief." The back describes the President as a "crook," "draft dodger," "cocaine addict," and "lying drunk driver." Small images of martini glasses, lines of cocaine, dollar signs, and oil wells also appear on the shirt. When an administrator told him he couldn't wear it to school because of the references to drugs and alcohol, Guiles sued.

In an important ruling last fall, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals held that Guiles had the First Amendment right to wear the T-shirt to school. The court said that, under the Supreme Court's rulings in the *Tinker* (1969) and *Fraser* (1986) cases, school officials can censor student expression only if they can show that it is likely to cause a "substantial disruption" of school activities or is "vulgar, profane, or plainly offensive."

Describing the shirt as conveying "an anti-drug political message," the court ruled that it was neither disruptive nor "plainly offensive" and could not be banned.

It's not just left-leaning student rebels who are running off to court. Evangelical Christians and conservative students are also challenging the authority of school administrators to censor their tees. In one recent California case, a student sued after school officials banned his T-shirt, which stated that "homosexuality is shameful, be ashamed our school has embraced what God has condemned." In a similar Ohio case, the student's shirt said, "homosexuality is a sin, Islam is a lie, abortion is murder, some issues are just black and white."

Surprisingly, the courts hearing the two cases reached different conclusions. In the California case, the Ninth Circuit upheld the ban because the T-shirt interfered with the rights of gay students to get an education. "Speech that attacks high school students who are members of minority groups that have historically been oppressed and subjected to verbal and physical abuse can injure and intimidate them and interfere with their opportunity to learn," the court's ruling said.

The federal court in the Ohio case, however, ruled that the censorship was unconstitutional because there was no evidence that the controversial T-shirt was disruptive. A lawsuit over a similar shirt is currently pending in North Carolina.

Also last year, federal courts in Tennessee and Alabama upheld bans on clothing displaying the Confederate battle flag. In both cases, school officials successfully argued that the ban was permissible because the flag could inflame simmering racial hostilities and potentially disrupt the school.

—MICHAEL D. SIMPSON
NEA OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL

You Be the Judge

The Supreme Court has held that while students don't "shed their constitutional right to freedom of speech at the schoolhouse gate," schools can ban T-shirts that may be disruptive, are lewd or vulgar, or infringe on the rights of others. So you be the judge. Here are some actual lower court cases challenging T-shirt bans. Should students have the right to wear T-shirts bearing these words or images in school? Make your ruling, then check below to see whether federal judges agree with you.

1. **"Abortion is Homicide. You will not mock my God. You will stop killing my generation."**
2. **Silhouettes of men holding rifles, the letters "NRA," and the phrase "Shooting Sports Camp."**
3. **Jeff Foxworthy "you-might-be-a-redneck-if..." jokes.**
4. **"Coed Naked Band: Do It to the Rhythm."**
5. **"Somebody Went to HOOVER DAM And All I Got Was This 'DAM' Shirt."**
6. **Image of George W. Bush over the caption "International Terrorist."**
7. **Anti-Nazi patch (red circle with a line through it displayed over a swastika).**
8. **"Bong Hits 4 Jesus."**

Answers: 1. Yes (not disruptive), 2. Yes (not disruptive), 3.Yes (not disruptive), 4. No (vulgar), 5. No (vulgar), 6. Yes (not disruptive), 7. No (potentially disruptive), 8. Yes (not disruptive or lewd).

PHOTO: PHOTODISC

Can We Compete?

BY CINDY LONG

In the face of new global rivalries, the answer is still yes—and American math and science education has the world watching.

It's an important year for Bradley Jamison, a junior at Freedom High School in Loudoun County, Virginia. Not only does she have a heavy course load—including AP calculus, AP physics, and AP chemistry—but she'll also take the SAT, the test that decides whether she'll get into the college of her choice, where she hopes to pursue a math degree.

It's also a pivotal year for Shonai Someshwar, a tenth-grader in Bangalore, India, her country's booming high-tech capital. This year, Shonai and her classmates will also take an important test: the Secondary School Certificate examinations that determine where they will go to junior college, the intense pre-university program that constitutes "high school"—11th and 12th grade—in India.

Shonai has her sights set on Sophia's High School, where she'll study psychology, an unusual choice among India's students. Most of Shonai's friends have other ambitions—to attend a science and engineering-focused junior college. It's what their parents want, Shonai says, because it's where the jobs are.

"My friends are encouraged to take up math and science," says Shonai. "I think that very few students actually have an interest for the subjects...that most of them do [it] for the job opportunities. Our society feels that there is more money and more scope for science and math."

It's India's—and much of Asia's—appetite for science and math that makes some Americans nervous. It's also a large part of what prompted President Bush's American Competitiveness Initiative (ACI), announced during his January 2006 State of the Union address. The 10-year, $136 billion initiative earmarks $380 million for math and science instruction in the 2007 fiscal year. Following Bush's speech, the media latched on to the fear that America's foothold as a technological and economic superpower was slipping. A week after the State of the Union, the cover of *Time* asked a worried nation, "Is America Flunking Science?"

"I think it's a fear-driven generalization based on the rapid economic growth of [India and China], coupled with their size," says Gerald Bracey, education researcher and author of *What You Need To Know About the War Against America's Public Schools.*

The fear of competition is nothing new. In March 1958, a year after Russia launched *Sputnik*, the cover of *Life* magazine proclaimed a "Crisis in Education," which concluded that the Soviets beat America into space because their students were more serious and more advanced in science and math. It happened again in the 1980s when Japanese cars and electronics flooded the American marketplace. In 1983, a government commission on excellence in education issued *A Nation at Risk*, warning of a "rising tide of

American math whiz **Bradley Jamison** has liked the subject since third grade.

BORDER PHOTO: DANNY PECK; STUDENT: SCOTT SUCHMAN

mediocrity" among American students. Many of those students went on to lead the dot-com revolution of the 1990s.

But now, as countries like China and India emerge as economic powerhouses, the calls of crisis have returned. Three months after the State of the Union, Intel Chairman Craig Barrett spoke at a conference in New Orleans entitled "Is America Losing Its Edge?" Education reporters packed into a hotel ballroom to listen to Barrett's dire predictions about the performance of American students in math and science and the demise of the U.S. dominance of the global marketplace.

"I want my grandchildren to have the same opportunities I had when the U.S. was the only game in town," he said, adding that Intel, which has partnered with NEA on the tech-focused Partnership for 21st Century Skills, could hire only foreign employees from countries such as India and China and still be competitive. Not because of a cheaper high-tech workforce, he insisted, but because of a more educated workforce than that in the United States. He recommended finding out what's happening in classrooms around the world, saying that if he were an educator, he'd "buy a ticket to other countries to see how they do it."

That's essentially what's happening in Louisville, Kentucky, where administrators and teachers are working with General Electric on a multi-million-dollar overhaul of math and science education, with an eye on practices used by the best schools in countries like Japan and Singapore (see "Singapore on the Ohio," page 28).

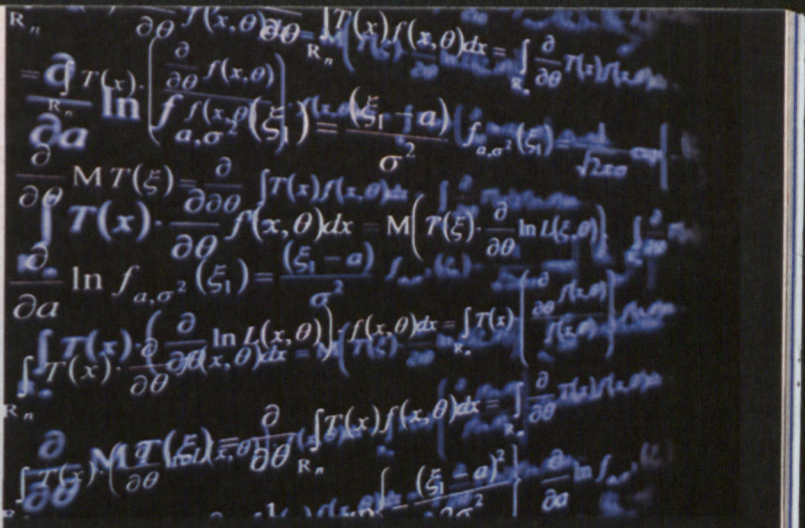
But it's not as simple as buying a plane ticket. Nor is it as one-sided as critics would lead us to believe. While American educators look overseas for solutions, many of those countries are examining our classrooms, hoping to replicate the American model of success.

Last October, Bradley Jamison stood before a white board crammed with row after dizzying row of calculations. Her AP calculus classmates called out suggestions to help her puzzle through the problem. Once it was solved, teacher Carl Giesy, who has two math degrees and a master's in education, led the class in a round of applause. The entire time, a delegation of teachers and officials from the Chinese Ministry of Education stood in the back of the room, marveling at the level of interaction between the students and their teacher.

"We think in the U.S. there is greater respect for the students, that they are viewed as people," says Dinghua Wang, director of China's Ministry of Education Policy Division for Basic Education. "We also admire how teachers are able to motivate students."

Motivating students to think creatively is now a goal of the Chinese ministry, which has sent delegations to classrooms like Giesy's across the United States as part of a reform movement to increase student ingenuity. Chinese students may perform well on tests because of an ability to recite rote knowledge,

ILLUSTRATION: ANDREY PROKHOROV



Investing in Professional Development:

It's Not Rocket Science

To see the impact of the National Science Foundation's (NSF) contributions to education and innovation, look no further than the *Oxford English Dictionary*, where the verb "Google" was added to the global lexicon last year. The company's founders (both products of public high schools) met at Stanford where they studied computer science under an NSF-funded faculty member.

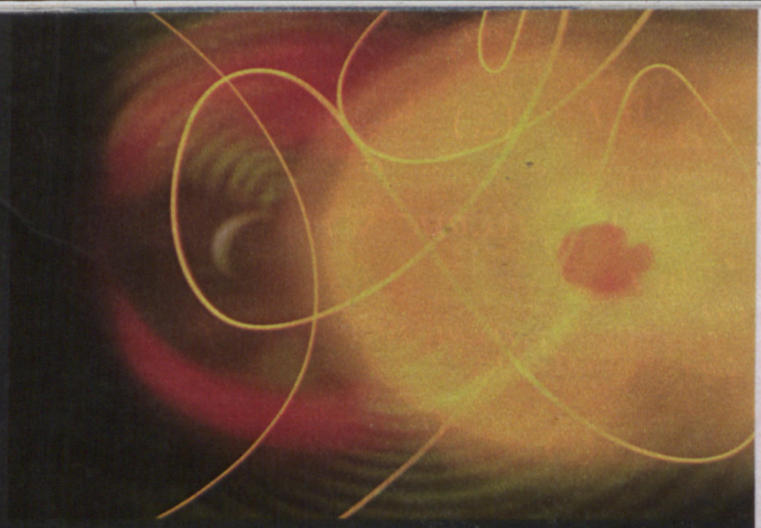
Math and science educators nationwide owe part of their success to professional development from organizations like NSF. Professional development, says veteran teacher Becky Pringle, helps tap into students' curiosity, which is the key to understanding and achievement.

"It was through professional development that I learned and developed techniques to bring science alive for my students, so they could understand both the content and its relevance," Pringle, an eighth-grade science teacher in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and NEA Executive Committee member, said in testimony to the House Science Committee last year. "NEA believes that improving professional development is the single most critical factor in strengthening math and science education. No single change will make a bigger difference in helping students reach high academic standards than ensuring quality teachers."

To bolster professional development, NSF's Math and Science Partnership awards grants to higher education institutions and K–12 school systems that work together to pioneer advances in math and science education. The program also encourages some of the brightest science and math minds to enter the teaching profession through college and university scholarship programs.

Although Bush's American Competitiveness Initiative would increase funding for science and math, very little goes to professional development for teachers, and it doesn't cover NSF's education programs—the Administration's proposed budget cuts NSF's K–12 programs by about 7 percent. In fact, between FY 2004 and the FY 2007 request, funding for NSF's main K–12 programs has declined by nearly half, from $283 million to $150 million.

"The business community and the Bush Administration are calling for better math and science education, and at the same time, they haven't put funding where we need it," says NEA educational policy analyst Andrea Prejean. "The math and science partnership elements of No Child Left Behind have also never been funded at the level they were authorized. If we want to improve math and science education in America, we need to make smart investments."



What's in a Score?

American students don't score at the top of the class in math and science compared with students from other industrialized countries. U.S. scores are up and down, but generally about average.

Does that matter? Not a bit, says Keith Baker, a former U.S. Education Department analyst, and he says he can prove it.

In an article due to be published later this year, Baker looks at how well math scores predict the performance of a nation's economy. The answer: They don't.

Baker's analysis begins with the scores of the 12-year-olds from 11 industrialized nations who took part in the First International Math Study (FIMS) in 1964. American students came in second to last, ahead of only Sweden. Baker looked at what happened decades later when those 12-year-olds were running the U.S. economy. America's economy grew at a rate of 3.3 percent per year from 1992 to 2002. The countries that scored higher than the U.S. grew at a slower rate—2.5 percent—during the same period. All in all, countries that did better in the test competition did worse in the economic competition.

Did the higher scores result in more innovation—which might show up in the number of patents? No again. The United States "clobbered the world on creativity, with 326 patents per million people," compared with 127 per million in the countries whose kids scored higher, Baker reports.

Why? Baker has a theory, although he can't prove it. "It turns out the elementary school teachers who have been saying all along that there is more to education than what is reflected in test scores were right and the 'experts' were wrong," he says. That doesn't mean the scores are meaningless, he explains, but once a country achieves a certain level of academic achievement, focusing more effort and money on the skills measured by tests doesn't pay off.

but education officials are concerned that they lack the ability U.S. students have to apply that knowledge once the tests are over.

"Global competitiveness depends on students' abilities to innovate and invent, not on their test scores," agrees Yong Zhao, professor and director of the U.S.-China Center for Research on Educational Excellence at Michigan State University. America has long embraced its students' passion, ingenuity, dreams, and ideas—none of which can be measured by test scores, says Zhao. Asia, on the other hand, has traditionally valued test scores above all else. Even where scores are high and innovative educational approaches are valued, as in Singapore, it's still felt that testing plays too much of a role.

"Yours is a talent meritocracy, ours is an exam meritocracy," Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Minister of Education of Singapore, said in a *Newsweek* interview. "There are some parts of the intellect that we are not able to test well—like creativity, curiosity, a sense of adventure, ambition....America has a culture of learning that challenges conventional wisdom, even if it means challenging authority. These are the areas where Singapore must learn from America."

But the increased focus on standardized testing here threatens to push American education in the wrong direction, experts warn. "We're reducing our ability to be competitive with measures like NCLB," Zhao says. "We're disadvantaging our students by celebrating points and test scores rather than what really matters."

Ever since the first international comparison of student performance in math and science in the 1960s, it's been hard to see clearly through the blizzard of scores and statistics, many of which paint a grim, if superficial, picture. Intel's Barrett pointed to a National Academies study called *Rising Above the Gathering Storm: Energizing and Employing America for a Brighter Economic Future*. According to the study, 70,000 engineers graduated from U.S. higher ed institutions in 2004, compared to 350,000 in India and more than 600,000 in China.

These figures have been cited far and wide, but Duke University researchers debunked them, finding that the United States annually produces nearly double the number of engineers suggested by the report, while both China and India produce dramatically less, with varying levels of expertise. According to Salil Tripathi in the *Wall Street Journal*, the National Academies comparison was false: Washington apples were being compared to Alphonso mangoes and Chinese litchis.

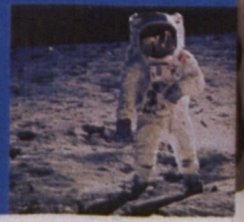
Like comparisons of engineers, ranking American students

Down and out? Or up and at 'em?

The last half-century has seen several scares that sparked claims that American public schools were not preparing their students for the modern world. But in each case, our students proved more than equal to the competition.

1957 The Soviet Union launches *Sputnik*, the world's first Earth satellite.

1969 Neil Armstrong walks on the moon.



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Chinese physics teacher **Wang Qi** (far right) and other members of a Chinese Ministry of Education delegation watch students build a model rocket during a visit to an aerospace science class at Virginia's Freedom High School. U.S. students, said one visitor, "are viewed as people."

among their Asian counterparts is akin to counting "apples and aardvarks," says Bracey, author of *Reading Educational Research: How to Avoid Getting Statistically Snookered.* For instance, it's not possible to claim based on test scores that American students are falling behind those in India and China, as neither country is included in the three most widely known international assessments: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), or Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

In addition, he says, once you get beyond the best students at elite schools, children in both countries face a widespread lack of access to education. Only 40 percent of Chinese students make it past ninth grade, and 37 percent of Indians are illiterate, according to Bracey.

Even among countries participating in global assessments, the comparisons are not as cut-and-dried as those who cite *Rising Above the Gathering Storm* might believe. In 2005, a University of Pennsylvania researcher analyzed TIMSS and PISA surveys conducted since 1990 and found that U.S. students generally perform above average, not "dead last," as columnist Charles Krauthammer has written.

Among the biggest problems with many international surveys is that they make inaccurate or unfair comparisons, adds Erling Boe, a professor in the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. For example, the 1995 TIMMS showed U.S. high school students outscored by counterparts in every surveyed nation except Lithuania, Cyprus, and South Africa. Sounds alarming—until you consider that students were tested during their final year of secondary school "as defined by each participating nation," which in many countries is well beyond the 12th grade, Boe says.

In the 2000 PISA survey, which tested 10th-graders in 22 industrialized nations, U.S. students' combined scores in reading, mathematics, and science fell "at about the international average," Boe says. "The U.S. is quite comparable to other major Western nations and should have little to fear in losing out economically."

1980s

Japanese electronics surge ahead. *A Nation at Risk* warns of "a rising tide of mediocrity," ignoring the fact that U.S. math scores were higher than ever.

1990s

Americans who were in school when the nation was supposedly "at risk" lead the world into the Information Age.

2000s

Driven by ultra low costs, Chinese manufacturing and Indian software engineering surge ahead.

2010s

Americans lead a new biotech revolution?

STUDENTS: SCOTT SUCHMAN

At Freedom High School, math chair Deborah Strickler is all too aware of the comparisons being made between American math students and those around the world, but she doesn't think that test scores can accurately measure the aptitude of all students. "There are many excellent math students who experience test freeze when you put a pencil and paper in front of them," she says. "But give them a hands-on assignment and they can always puzzle it out."

Strickler also believes test scores don't reflect talent because American students are forced into a one-size-fits-all mold with lower-level math requirements. "Here, every single child must take algebra, but in Asia only those going to math and science academies take it," she says. "As a result, we can't cover as much as quickly because the curriculum is watered down. We're not supposed to track students, but it seems we've forgotten that students' minds develop differently."

Correspondents from the *Financial Times* back up Strickler's assertions. After observing successful secondary schools around the world, they determined that the best schools were locally controlled and emphasized individualized learning, where teaching is tailored to students' needs. But writer Jon Boone doubts that "world-beating educational systems can be cut and pasted from one country to another." For example, Finland's small and homogenous population could explain why it ranked highest in overall education according to PISA.

And in developing countries, where populations far outpace opportunities, students like Shonai Someshwar and her classmates compete for scarce jobs. "Peer pressure to excel is very high—there are higher demands in India as opportunities are scarce for such a large population," says Lochani Subramanian, who teaches science and math to Bangalore eighth-, ninth-, and tenth-graders. "It is a matter of pride for a parent to say that his child was a science student."

Shonai's parents are an exception. "They have never forced me to study math and science. They have always told me to study what I want to and what I like," she says. And the same is true of Bradley Jamison's parents. She hasn't been pressured to pursue a math degree for job prospects. She likes math and is good at it.

Choosing to follow one's passions is inherently American. Even though countries like India and China are racing to recreate a U.S.-style environment for innovation and ingenuity, America will always have the advantage, says Yong Zhao of Michigan State University. "With a diversity of talents among many different people," he says, "we'll continue to flourish." nea

Send comments on this story to clong@nea.org.

Singapore O

Louisville union and administration join to get math and science right.

BY ALAIN JEHLEN

For some teachers, the giant, hissing Madagascar cockroaches might be a problem. The high-stakes test on a competing subject is definitely a problem. And school officials who tell teachers what to do instead of listening—they're not helping, either.

Improving math and science education in the real world is tough and messy. That's what they're finding in Louisville, Kentucky. But it's happening anyway.

"It's all about preparing kids to live in this global, diverse, ever-changing society," says middle school math teacher Kat Crawford. She is one of seven teachers playing a possibly unique role in science and math reform: They have been released to work full-time on a massive program to revamp K–8 math and science education, and they're primarily responsible to their union, not the district administration. "We can stand outside of the system and bring the real questions to the table," says Crawford, adding, "It's not all hunky-dory and easy. At times, it's like pulling teeth."

Supported by a $25 million General Electric (GE) Foundation grant, the Jefferson County Teachers Association (JCTA) and the district administration together launched the ambitious project to develop world-class standards—by which they mean the approach used in the best schools of high-scoring countries like Japan and Singapore. Whether the high test scores are due to superior instruction is open to debate, but their teaching strategy, says Crawford, makes sense.

That approach includes less rote memorizing of facts forgotten right after the quiz and more getting students to think through the mysteries of numbers and the natural world. They want to stop rushing to "cover" a large number of topics and focus on teaching fewer topics to mastery. They want less lecturing, more action.

Louisville already has extraordinary educators who teach that way. Tara Hengartner skips making her seventh-grade students

n the Ohio

memorize the properties of chemical elements. Instead, she hands out cards that describe real elements with fake names, and has her students puzzle out the patterns so they come to understand the Periodic Table. Third-grade teacher Sytrina Turner gets her children up out of their seats to act out multiplication so they can feel the math. Jason Hubler, whose funky fifth-grade classroom features a collection of X-Men comic books to lure reluctant readers, teaches area and perimeter by having students calculate how much carpet and trim they'll need to renovate a house.

Louisville wants this kind of teaching used throughout its schools, supported by rewritten standards and excellent materials that teachers don't have to spend their weekends developing. Creating that new system in the midst of competing pressures—big classes, standardized tests that impose their own agendas, and struggling inner city families—is hard. It requires constant reality checks to be sure the plans and materials are practical. And that is why the union's independent role is essential.

In October, for example, the district held a professional development session on the new science units, and many teachers came away angry. "My time is wasted because I really need help in social studies and math," said one fifth-grade teacher. His reason: Kentucky gives tough, high-stakes tests in social studies and math, not science, in fifth grade. The union's released-time teachers were there to hear the complaints and bring them to the joint task force managing the whole effort.

Teacher input also flows through many other channels, like building rep meetings and surveys. At one informal feedback session, Melissa Ronayne, who teaches science to third-graders at a Montessori magnet school, protests that the new science units bring up topics in an order that's different from the Montessori sequence—rocks first, living creatures later. She's gotten nowhere with the district office, but the union reps promise to go to the project steering committee with the simple idea that everybody doesn't have to use the new units in the same order.

Teachers bring up other problems, like the lack of time provided for feeding and cleaning up after creatures such as crayfish and the Madagascar hissing cockroaches, which are shipped in for biology lessons. "I don't have time to babysit a bunch of crayfish," says Ronayne. Worse than taking care of them, she adds, is having to kill them afterward: "I had to stuff them into a Ziploc bag and stick them in the freezer, and they were all writhing and fighting," she reports. "I didn't feel real good about it."

Fifth-grade teacher Ann Walls says some of the new assessment materials are badly written and useless to teachers. "It's classic 'garbage in, garbage out,'" she says. Louisville suffers from far too many disjointed tests required by different parts of the school administration, says JCTA President Brent McKim. Walls and other teachers have filed a class-action grievance to try to bring the testing regimen under control.

The math and science project got underway last year and is scheduled to go at least until 2009. (GE awarded similar grants to Cincinnati and Stamford, Connecticut, this school year.)

Mike Ice explores the nature of matter with his second-graders. **Sytrina Turner** (opposite) teaches multiplication by putting kids in motion.

In Louisville, elementary and middle schools voted last spring to use the inquiry-based science modules chosen by the administration-union task force. By and large, the new materials are doing a great job of engaging students. Walk into Caryn Walker's third-grade class and you'll hear:

"Look! A claw!"

"This one's a mouse leg!"

And the occasional "Ew!!"

The children are dissecting owl pellets and sound like they'll remember this lesson for a long, long time. (For the uninitiated, owls eat their prey whole and use their gizzards to press inedible parts like bones and feathers into pellets, which they regurgitate.)

Meanwhile, the project's math teachers are working with a commercial publisher to develop new lessons and materials. Recently, the union reps put a hold on the publisher's professional development program because they hadn't had a chance to check it out with teachers in other districts that are using it.

What gave the union that power? The GE Foundation said from the start that the project steering committee must make its decisions by consensus. "Teachers are the ones delivering the message to the children, so we're passionate about getting teachers unions and the central office to do this in collaboration," says Kelli Wells, head of the foundation's education programs.

But in 2009, the GE money is due to run out. Will teacher participation end with it? McKim says the union bargained the consensus decision-making and professional leave for teachers into a formal memorandum of agreement, so if the district wants to keep the innovation going, it will need to do so with its teachers.

It's an unusual arrangement, but JCTA is an unusual union, McKim says. "Generally, unions that get involved with curriculum and instruction are not very militant, and unions that are militant don't get involved with curriculum," he notes. "We're militant, and we use our militancy to push our curriculum agenda."

That's good for teachers and good for students, says McKim, because "success depends on teachers buying in, and that depends on teachers being full partners." nea

PHOTOS: BRIAN BOHANNON

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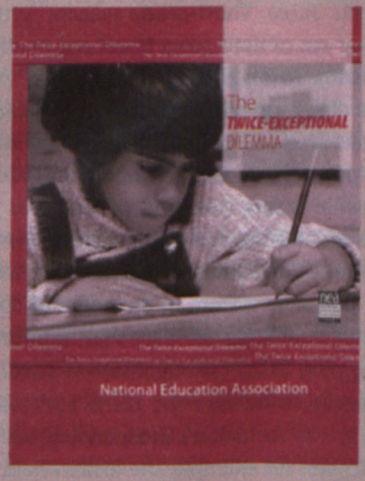

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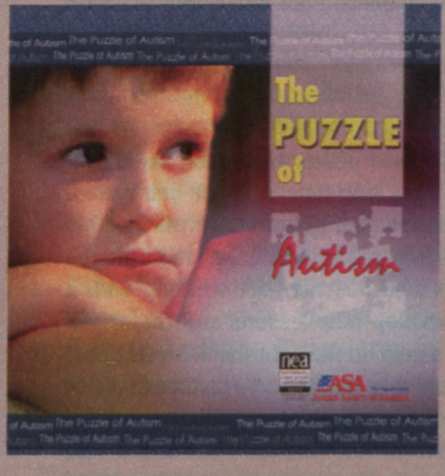

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A Band-Aid Solution

As nurses are squeezed by growing workloads and shrinking budgets, the burden of medical care increasingly falls on teacher's aides, secretaries, and other support professionals.

BY REBECCA L. WEBER

As children walk to their classrooms at Cherokee Elementary in Alexandria, Louisiana, Sharon Scott greets each one with "good morning," calling many by name. Some kids are still Monday-morning sleepy, and others are speedwalking down the halls. A few, like Sam, a fifth-grader who was diagnosed as a diabetic before he was school age, get more personal. "I'm his school mom," Scott says as they hug. Chase, with spiky hair that was bleached some time back, also checks in; he'll see her later in the day, when it's time for his inhaler. Dressed in primary red pants, a bright yellow Dr. Seuss shirt, and black Mary Janes, Scott stands with her hands clasped behind her back. This is perhaps the calmest moment of her day.

ESP **Sharon Scott's** role includes medical duties.

Classes begin and Scott heads to the nurse's station, a euphemistic name for what's essentially a long closet outfitted with storage cabinets and a sink. The windowless room has no ventilation; a small fan Scott bought with her own money whirs away. She makes do without a computer or even a chair for herself—there's barely room for the patient seat and the cabinets, drawers, and mini-fridge that hold prescription medicines, EpiPens, antiseptic wipes, inhalers, files, and fruit juice bottles.

Scott spends most of her seven-plus hour days standing here, attending to students with chronic and acute medical needs. She has 37 students' individual medical plans on a neatly written list—which keeps growing. Most of the kids refer to her as the nurse, but she was never trained as one. Scott was hired as a teacher's assistant, and she is still responsible for making copies for the school's first-grade teachers and reading the after-school bus announcements. But most of her time is spent attending to the medical needs of Cherokee's 700-plus students.

Increasing medical needs are straining the ability of school districts across the country to retain adequate numbers of school nurses. But while the percentage of medically fragile children with chronic conditions such as asthma is rising, many states and school districts are slashing health care budgets. Without school nurses present, the burden of medical care increasingly falls on the shoulders of some of the lowest-paid employees at the school: teacher's aides, secretaries, and other support professionals.

The education support professionals (ESPs) who bear this ever-increasing medical load typically were hired to perform other roles—but the "and other duties as assigned" clause kicks in. David Clark, an organizational specialist in Florida, once sat in on training where support staff were instructed how to give a shot. A peach was used for the model. "These people, who generally are underpaid and underappreciated, with limited medical background, are being put in a very difficult position," he says. "What stuns me is that for the amount of money they're paid, and the status that they're denied, they're literally asked to do a life-or-death thing."

Since Scott has been at Cherokee, the student population has swelled from about 450 to over 700. But the school's other paraprofessional who shared medical duties with Scott was cut because of budget constraints. "I had the most medical training—and I use that term loosely," says Scott. So now everyone, she says, refers to her as the nurse. Even the district RN calls Scott "the real school nurse."

On her weekly visit to Cherokee this spring morning, she and Scott are searching through the locks of a morose little girl with a

PHOTO: JOHN BALLANCE

"These people, who g
limited medical backg

stylish bob. The adults keep the talk cheerful: What a lovely haircut; it's got good body. The student, who had been sent home the previous week for head lice, is relieved to hear she can return to school.

Next, an asthmatic boy comes in before his PE class. He was diagnosed just a few weeks ago, so Scott coaches him with his inhaler. After taking a dose, he has trouble holding it in. "Pretend you're sucking on a straw," Scott advises, and he giggles, losing the rest of the dose. He tries again with a straight face.

Another, younger girl on the verge of tears takes her turn, gripping the chair seat tightly. She keeps her eyes on the floor, ignoring the comments about her lovely blond highlights as Scott searches her hair for nits.

"I worked on her hair so long, she fell asleep," her mother says. "If it couldn't be sprayed, it got doused with bleach."

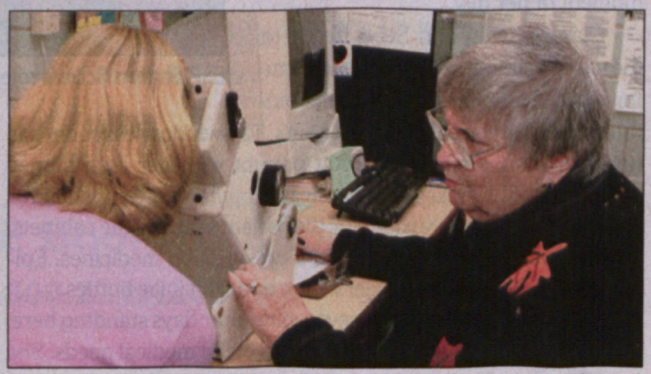
"It's so hard to spot them," says Scott. When her daughter is given the OK to go back to class, it's hard to say who is most relieved.

That sense of relief rarely extends to Scott. "There are times when you don't feel qualified," she says.

Even in places where nurses are more readily available, their workloads are changing. Norma Nikkola works in a small Ohio town that, over the past few years, has lost five of its seven school nurses. One of her assistants now dispenses medication and does regular tube feedings. Even the principal has been trained as a backup.

The National Association of School Nurses (NASN) recommends at least one school nurse for every 750 students with general needs. (The ratio changes dramatically when considering students with substantial or profound disabilities.) Some states and districts are increasing the number of nurses to keep pace with medical needs, but others aren't. As a result, nurses like Nikkola often worry about the quality of care they can provide.

"A lot of people don't know what school nursing has become, with asthmatics, diabetics, overweight kids," she says. "We're overwhelmed with individual health care plans, screenings, paperwork. We don't have the opportunity for hands-on



Nurse **Norma Nikkola's** district has lost five of its seven school nurses over the past few years. Even a principal now serves as a backup.

PHOTOS TOP: JOHN BALLANCE; BOTTOM: PETER WINE

care, for follow-up, or counseling. We can't be used to the fullest extent of our training."

While nurses increasingly share their workload with other staff, they remain responsible for the outcome—and should be the ones deciding who can handle what, argues NASN President Sue Will. "The nurse is the one who needs to determine what will be delegated to a paraprofessional," she says. "Health problems change day to day and across the school year. You need somebody with a medical background and licensing."

By early March in central Louisiana, azalea blooms are already turning into lush, deep green bushes. The pollen count is climbing; mosquitoes are out looking for fresh blood. Gym class meets daily, and the outdoor track is concrete. But when scraped-up kids come to Scott, she directs them to wash the wounds, or instructs them to ask their parents to cut off torn skin when they get home. State law prohibits nurses and other staff members from administering any topical medications or antiseptic. At one point, Band-Aids were banned because of adhesive allergies, but now the school allows Scott to use the latex-free bandages she picks up on her own time.

A silent, sandy-haired little boy sits folded into himself as he holds a baggie of ice on his pale, thin arm. His teacher spotted the big, ugly welt near his wrist, and walked him down to the nurse's station, where Scott calls his father.

When his father—a handsome, burly man with the same face as his son—walks in a bit later, the boy smiles. Dad produces a well-used tube and squeezes out pink ointment.

"Has he always been allergic?" Scott asks. She keeps detailed files on all students with medical histories, but this is the boy's first visit.

"Yeah, look at this scar. He's got a little eczema, too. Do y'all want this?"

"We can't put on any ointment."

"It's not like the old days!" the parent replies. "I used to get all swabbed up."

While barred from administering some medications, ESPs like Scott are still expected to perform other, often complex medical procedures, including tube feedings and urinary catheterizations. Over the years, Scott has assisted or performed the latter procedure for a half-dozen children. Her training consisted of a video and a nurse who "walked us through it," she recalls. "Seeing a video and actually doing it are two different things." At one point, she had to train a second-grader to do it herself. "I remember feeling very inadequate to have to train this child to do this," she says. "If a child cannot do it, I believe a medical person should. In most cases, they were paralyzed from the waist down—they had no feeling, and cannot say, 'Ow, you're doing that wrong.'"

It's past time to check in with her school's five first-grade teachers to see what assistance they need with photocopying, laminating, and the like. "I'm sometimes not doing them justice," she says. Nor does Scott's salary do justice to the work she does—after nearly three decades of experience in the same district, her salary is capped at just below $15,000. Many of her peers are only able to get by with food stamps or live in subsidized housing.

But Scott loves taking care of children, especially the one-on-one time with those with chronic health problems. Nine-

enerally are underpaid and underappreciated, with round, are being put in a very difficult position."

– David Clark, organizational specialist in Florida

year-old Tristan has a variety of physical and mental needs, but he's mainstreamed and his needs are relatively minor compared to some of the special ed children she's worked with in the past. While he always had a bit of an unusual gait, Tristan was recently diagnosed with cerebral palsy and now wears leg braces. His cleft palate impairs his ability to eat and swallow—he's the only student who chews his pills. ("Ooh, bitter!") But he knows the drill: Pills, then a little reward.

"Where are the Spider-Man stickers?"

"I don't have any. You can have a bunny sticker."

"I'm scared of the Easter Bunny."

"No, he's not scary. You can have a sticker."

"I'll have chocolate chips."

Scott changes the subject. "How's the brace?"

"Not great."

She gives him his pills.

"They're yuck," he says. He demonstrates that he's already strong and healthy: he flexes and pats his bicep.

"Have you had any water? Drink, drink. Hey, let me see." He swallows all the water, sticks his tongue out, then up.

Tristan chooses a sticker that she places near his shirt pocket. He then hops out, bunny-style. nea

State of the Arts

Despite mounting evidence of its role in student achievement, arts education is disappearing in the schools that need it most.

BY SABRINA HOLCOMB

A lesson on immigration provides an opportunity for some dramatic arts, in the form of storytelling, courtesy of English teacher **Jamie Myrick**.

DOES ART IMITATE LIFE at Adams Middle School?

Picture full-length mirrors reflecting an empty dance studio where no one practices at the barre, while cameras from a terminated television class sit in a computer lab. How does music sound in a room where instruments lie silent? And is the play still the thing in a theater that's now merely a set for an English class?

Like many schools across the country, Adams once had a flourishing arts program. Now, five years after the No Child Left Behind law (NCLB) first opened to mixed reviews from captive audiences, arts education must fight for a seat in the classroom, despite the law's inclusion of the arts as a core academic subject. A small number of forward-thinking school districts have begun to integrate the arts across the curriculum and into the fabric of the school day. But in the vast majority of public schools, arts programs—and teachers—are in more trouble than ever, despite the growing body of evidence showing a powerful link between arts education, student achievement, and teacher performance.

"With the push from NCLB to focus on testing, arts and education are treated as if they're not compatible," says Jamie Myrick, an English teacher at Adams. "People are forgetting that math is taught when a child is playing an instrument. English is taught when a child is reading or writing a script. Critical thinking is taught when a child is analyzing art."

Today, Adams, located in California's West Contra Costa school district, offers visual arts and band classes just 60 percent of the time, while drama, dance, piano keyboarding, photography, and television classes have been cut entirely from the school day. Despite the cutbacks, Myrick and her colleagues have been fighting valiantly to keep the arts alive at their school.

In the early days of NCLB, says Myrick, all the teachers pitched in to offer students "anime, poetry, dance, drama—a little bit of everything" twice a week. Even though the school recorded growth under California's Academic Performance Indicator, the pressure to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) has inten-

sified, and a significant percentage of the student body is now enrolled in double English and math classes. Electives such as dance, television, and crafts were relegated to an after-school program run by educators and community artists. Some educators worry that after-school programs make the arts an afterthought, but for many students, these programs are the only access they have to the arts—and even that access is limited. It's hard for students who have to ride the bus to stay after school, says Myrick, especially in winter when night comes early.

An urban school with a transient population of English-language learners, Adams fits a growing profile of schools most likely to have their curriculum stripped to the bone. "We're finding that the kids who are not getting art are often Hispanics and African-Americans," say Myrick and her colleague, part-time art teacher Cathy Coleman. A 2004 study commissioned by the Council for Basic Education states that research "lends support to the overall thrust of anecdotal accounts that poor and minority students are bearing the brunt of...a waning commitment to the arts." The "greatest erosion of the curriculum," the study reports, "is occurring in schools with high minority populations, the very populations whose access to such curriculum has been historically most limited."

GATEWAY TO LEARNING

Both Myrick and Coleman do their creative best to address the inequity. Myrick, a professional storyteller and former drama teacher, integrates the dramatic arts into her English curriculum. "Storytelling captures the attention of every learning style and every type of student," she says. Myrick, who sometimes dresses in character, had students spellbound when she recently taught a lesson dressed as the Statue of Liberty. "We were reading about immigrants, and I acted out the lesson for the kids from the point of view of 'Liberty' watching all these different people coming into America."

Now, many students who enter her class reading at second-, third-, and fourth-grade levels end up testing close to—or at—grade level. Last year, she had a "miracle." A student who entered her class reading at a fourth-grade level in August tested at a 12th-grade level by January. "Dramatic instruction works well with all children," explains Myrick, "the tough 'I don't want to sit down and listen to you' students and the children who are very on-task. No one is lost on the fringes."

"And that's the part that breaks my heart," says Myrick about NCLB. "We're losing the ability to hook our students with what their joy is. It might be playing a musical instrument. Or working with their hands in an art class. That joy is a natural bridge that can transfer over to math, history, and science. The things that are complex and heavy in these subjects become clearer when students do work they have joy in."

Coleman knows about this bridging effect firsthand. "That's what happened to me when I was in school," she says. "I didn't like history, but as I learned more about art, I realized how art and history were interconnected, and I started to really enjoy and do well in history."

Which is why Coleman makes sure her own students understand how fully art is interwoven into their daily lives. She tells them everything they touch was created by an artist: industrial designers made the cars they ride in and the furniture they use, fashion designers made the clothes they wear, and graphic artists illustrated the video games they play. Her students' first assignment is choosing the art career that most intrigues them and designing a product in that field. Coleman also rounds out her art lessons with vocabulary tests and writing assignments.

Even so, Coleman worries that her students don't have the opportunities she did when she was in school. "If students aren't testing proficient in English and math, they can't take an elective. Instead, they take double English and double math. Of course, our children must be literate, but I question the way we're going about it." She recounts the saga of one talented student who begged to study art all through middle school, but is now graduating without ever taking an art class.

Art teacher **Cathy Coleman** sees many children who may never take a dance, art, or music class.

"I see all these children who may never take a dance, art, or music class," says Coleman. When these same kids are encouraged to think creatively, she adds, they invent their own learning opportunities. She describes walking into her art room one day and hearing her sixth-graders singing. "They had made up a rap with my vocabulary words to study for their vocabulary test," Coleman recalls. "Every one of them got an A! It just blew me away."

STATE OF THE NATION

As beleaguered schools across the country cut arts programs, some teachers' jobs are being eliminated entirely, while others, like Coleman's, have been reduced to part-time. Many arts teachers who still have full-time positions end up juggling so many

MYRICK AND COLEMAN PHOTOS: SEAN CONNELLEY; TRUMPET PHOTO: STOCKDISC

schools that, in essence, they're really working two full-time jobs, says Janis Leiberman, an instrumental music teacher and head of the West Contra Costa school district's music department. To provide every elementary school in the district with an instrumental music program, each full-time music teacher has to divide his or her time among six schools. The end result: Many instructors teach 30 to 40 students playing very different instruments for just a half hour twice a week.

In Dallas, Texas, elementary school students will lose their band programs entirely as they are phased out over the next three years as part of a restructuring that shifts the programs to middle schools, reports Charles Turner, chair of NEA's Fine Arts Caucus and a band instructor at Fred Florence Middle School. "Some elementary schools will retain their orchestra programs," says Turner, "but the principal will have to choose between hiring an orchestra teacher or a teacher of another curriculum."

Even arts magnet schools are not immune. "We're getting hit from everywhere," reports Albert Stellmach, chair of the United Teachers of Dade Fine Arts Caucus, who teaches music at Miami's Perrine Elementary School, an "expressive arts" magnet. "At my school, they allow pullouts for extra reading and math classes. A student who signed up for music can be taken out for half a year. They're there on paper, but not in reality."

While Perrine has been able to retain all its teachers because of its magnet school status, it's been a different story for other district schools. Keeping track of "disappearing" art teachers was one of the goals for starting the Fine Arts Caucus last year, says Stellmach. "Everybody knows we've lost teachers, but no one knows how many," he says. "We asked the union to run the numbers, and we found out we lost eight fine arts middle school teachers in one year." The caucus is distributing a survey to get more information on what's actually happening in the schools. Once they've collected the evidence, they'll meet first with their state legislators and then with their senators in Washington, D.C.

The caucus is also gathering data on the link between arts instruction and higher SAT scores. Stellmach refers to a 2005 College Board study that found that students who took four years of arts coursework outperformed peers who had taken similar classes for a half-year or less by 58 points on the verbal portion of the SAT and by 38 points on the math portion. "We know there's a big resistance to spending time and money on arts education," says Stellmach. "Our response is, 'Keep kids in band and drama, and their SAT scores will improve.'"

A NEW ATTITUDE

With study after study showing powerful links between arts education and student performance—especially for struggling students—why are the arts still expendable? Because fine arts are traditionally viewed as "affective and expressive, not academic or cognitive," says Nick Rabkin, executive director of the Center for Arts Policy at Columbia College in Chicago. That conventional view is beginning to change, however, as organizations advocate for arts instruction in public schools and educators develop new instructional strategies to integrate arts across the entire school curriculum.

"By recognizing the arts as cognitive, the field of education is starting to acknowledge the academic value and potential of arts instruction," says Amy Duma, director of the Kennedy Center's Changing Education Through the Arts (CETA), a Washington, D.C.-based professional development program focused on arts integration that was established with a pilot grant from the NEA Foundation.

One of the original CETA schools, Bailey's Elementary School for the Arts and Sciences in Fairfax County, Virginia, serves an elementary student population that's the most culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse in an increasingly diverse county. "The arts are a universal language," says Melanie Layne, the integration resource teacher at Bailey's, where over 70 percent of students are English-language learners.

bravura performances

Boosting Student Achievement

Critical Evidence, a report commissioned by the Arts Education Partnership and the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies in 2005, cites research studies documenting more than 65 distinct relationships between the arts and academic and social outcomes, including:

VISUAL ARTS instruction and reading readiness

DRAMATIC ENACTMENT and conflict resolution skills

LEARNING PIANO and mathematics proficiency

TRADITIONAL DANCE and nonverbal reasoning (Dancers scored higher than non-dancers on creative thinking measures, especially abstract thought.)

Promoting Social Growth

Arts activities promoted growth in students' social skills, including:

SELF-CONFIDENCE and self-control

CONFLICT RESOLUTION and collaboration

EMPATHY and social tolerance

The arts also play a key role in developing social competencies among educationally or economically disadvantaged youth who are at the greatest risk of dropping out.

Improving Instruction

The arts create a learning environment that fosters teacher innovation, a positive professional culture, and effective instructional practice.

PHOTOS: SEAN CONNELLEY

At Bailey's, grade-level teachers and arts teachers work in tandem to guide students through sophisticated and complex assignments. "You really do need the expertise of someone in the arts to truly integrate," says third-grade teacher Allyn Kurin. "Otherwise, you're just making up pretend dance steps that aren't connected to the content."

In one such assignment, students are given a scenario: As members of the professional dance troupe Geometry in Motion, they've been hired to create a performance for students in the lower grades. Choreography must include math objectives (similar polygons, congruent acute angles, quadrilaterals, and other geometric shapes) and dance objectives (using space at low, middle, and high levels and dance phrases with beginning, middle, and ending sequences). Another project integrates visual art, drama, history, and writing as students explore Virginia's history from European, African, and Native American perspectives.

"Fully integrating the arts has dramatically improved teaching and learning in my classroom," says Van Hoffman, a fifth-grade teacher at Bailey's. "I've learned to meld different content-area objectives and teach them in a fun and interesting way that's accessible."

Even when arts instruction is integrated into other subjects, arts teachers play another critical role, stress drama teachers Gloretta Wilson-Omolo Shale and Carmen Boatwright-Bacon. They can call students on their artistic choices and performances in a way classroom teachers often don't. "Classroom teachers have standards and expectations for their curriculum, but they don't always feel comfortable applying those standards and expectations to the artistic components of a lesson," says Wilson-Omolo Shale.

In Boatwright-Bacon's theater class, for instance, it's not enough for students to memorize their lines for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. When Grace recites her lines without any emotion, the drama teacher good-naturedly exclaims, "Stop! You're putting me to sleep!" "Do you have a pet?" she asks the fifth-grader. "Think of how happy you are to see her when you walk in the door. Then put that emotion and caring into your lines!" On her second try, a beaming Grace wins bravas and applause from her "audience."

But even the best-funded, most supportive schools aren't immune to the relentless pressures of standardized testing. The year before last, Bailey's missed AYP for the first time. Unlike Stellmach's arts magnet school in Florida, however, no children were pulled from arts classes to take double English and math. Instead of sacrificing their core philosophy, the staff at Bailey's decided to use art to help them beat the test.

They invited a Kennedy Center artist to work with the staff on a drama strategy that targeted testing vocabulary. "We passed AYP this year by the skin of our teeth," says Layne, "but we passed."

A case for the arts

A recent study by Americans for the Arts and the National School Boards Association found that young people who consistently participate in comprehensive, sequential, and rigorous arts programs are:

- **FOUR TIMES** more likely to be recognized for academic achievement.
- **FOUR TIMES** more likely to participate in a math and science fair.
- **THREE TIMES** more likely to win an award for school attendance.
- **FOUR TIMES** more likely to win an award for writing an essay or poem.
- **THREE TIMES** more likely to be elected to class office.

IT'S SHOWTIME

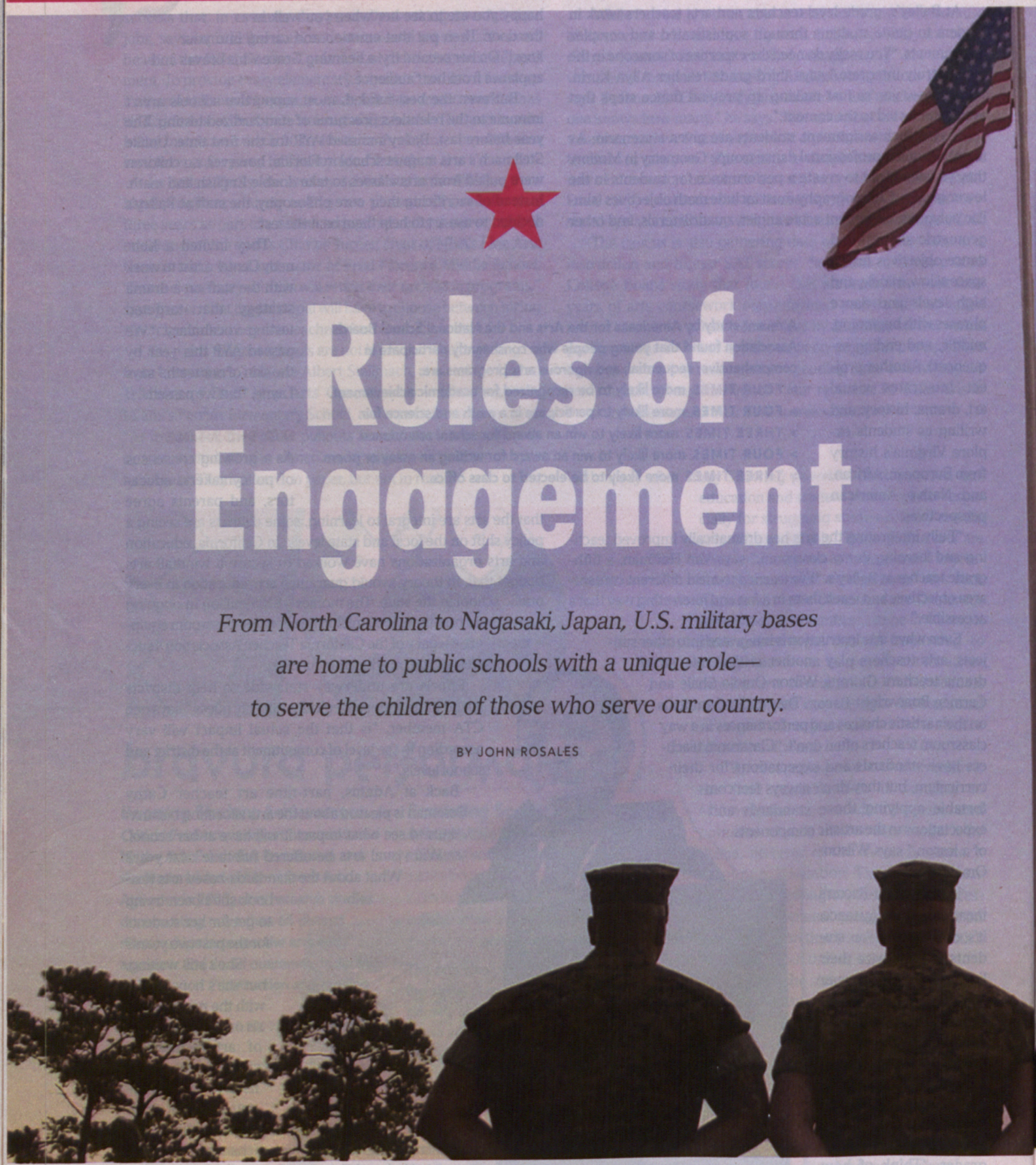
As a growing consensus of policymakers, educators, and parents agree that the arts are integral to learning, some districts are seeing a policy shift on the local and state levels. In California, education and arts organizations have worked to secure a windfall arts budget that, in theory, would guarantee arts education in every public school in the state. The monies—$105 million in ongoing funds, and a one-time, $500 million line item for classroom equipment—are a legacy of the California Teacher Association's successful lawsuit on education funding.

Efforts are underway statewide to help districts spend the money strategically, but "my guess," says one CTA member, "is that the actual impact will vary according to the level of commitment at the district and school levels."

Back at Adams, part-time art teacher Cathy Coleman is pleased about the arts allocation but anxious to see what impact it will have at her school. Will visual arts be offered full-time next year? What about the standards-based arts textbook she's been trying to get for her students for the past two years?

She's still waiting, but she's hopeful that with the new emphasis on the importance of arts education, she'll never again have to watch a talented student graduate without the chance to pick up a paintbrush. nea

Send comments on this story to sholcomb@nea.org.



Rules of Engagement

From North Carolina to Nagasaki, Japan, U.S. military bases are home to public schools with a unique role—to serve the children of those who serve our country.

BY JOHN ROSALES

PHOTOS: STEPHANIE BRUCE

THERESA HARDESTY removes a towel-sized American flag from a desk drawer and unfolds it in front of her prekindergarten students.

"What do we do now?" she asks rhetorically. "We stand."

Some of the children spring up and hit a brace—heels together, shoulders back, chest out, right hand on heart. One youngster is saluting. Another with long flyaway hair begins tiptoeing in place, head clicked way back, mouth agape, arms flapping like a bird.

"And we stand still, don't we," Hardesty adds, "just like our mommies and daddies."

Those moms and dads happen to be combat soldiers who live at Camp Lejeune, the sprawling Marine Corps base near Jacksonville, North Carolina. Some work and train at Lejeune; others are deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other assignments tied to national defense.

Whether at home or overseas, the Marine parent's presence is strongly felt at Tarawa Terrace 1 Primary Public School, named after the base housing area where it is located. Some of the children mimic soldier attire with desert camouflage pants and bright red T-shirts carrying the Marine emblem. One student proudly points to his red-and-blue "sergeant's shirt." "He calls it that because his dad just got promoted," Hardesty says.

The 36-year-old teacher understands her students and their family's military lifestyle. She was a "military brat" herself, the daughter of a Marine captain, and educated at similar on-base schools. Like many of her fellow teachers, administrators, and support staff, she is now the spouse of a Marine. Her sense of duty is unwavering.

"Flag etiquette is part of their culture," says Hardesty, who has taught on and off at one of Lejeune's eight public schools since the summer before finishing college in 1991. "I want them to know what to do when they're with their parents at military functions. It's expected."

Theresa Hardesty is a military spouse who teaches at one of Camp Lejeune's eight public schools.

★★★

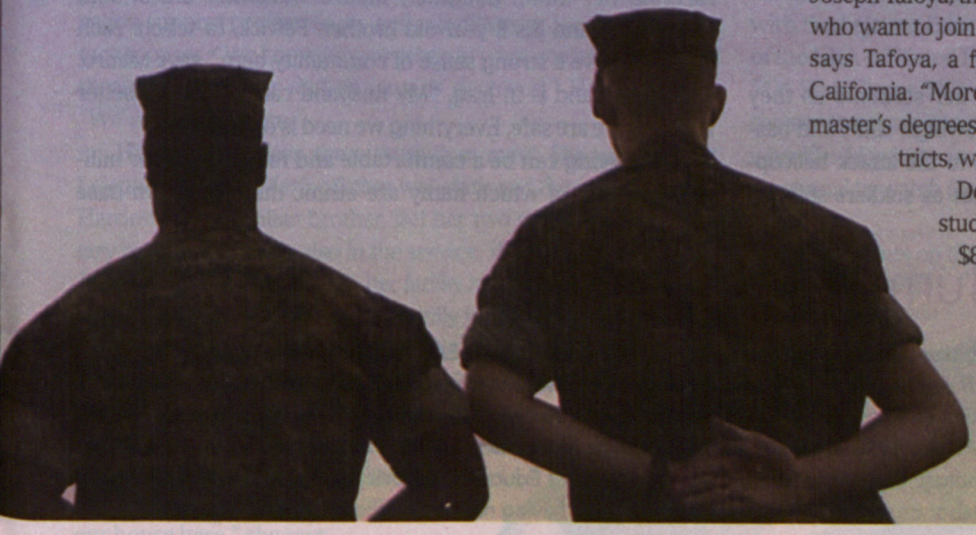
Much is expected and much is provided to the sons and daughters of active duty military. Hardesty's students are part of the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), a civilian agency that manages public schools on U.S. military bases around the world. The system serves an estimated 25,500 students in 63 schools located in seven states, Guam, and Puerto Rico; another 65,500 attend 154 schools in 13 countries, including Germany, Japan, and even Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

Students from DoDEA's on-base public schools routinely outscore, outperform, and outpace students from other schools. Some 95 percent of the system's high school seniors graduate, and 76 percent go on to some form of higher education, according to 2005 figures.

"Some people live on base so their kids can go to a base school," says Hardesty, who lives outside of Lejeune and must drive through its security checkpoint each morning.

A system that places a high value on safety and education, a well-trained teaching staff, and "great kids" are three elements that make DoDEA schools some of the best around, according to Joseph Tafoya, the system's director. "We have more people who want to join our system than there are slots available," says Tafoya, a former teacher and administrator from California. "More than two-thirds [of our educators] have master's degrees." Pay is comparable to many urban districts, with salaries starting at just under $36,000.

DoDEA spends an average of $13,500 per student—above both the national average of $8,287 in 2004 (the most current data available) and the highest-spending state (New Jersey, which spent $12,981 per student that year). But that figure is deceiving, Tafoya notes, pointing out that it covers everything from housing and living allowances



for staff working overseas to student activities. "When the football team at our Naples base has to play the team in Aviano [Italy], I have to fly them to the game," he says. "Our charter says we must provide our students with a comprehensive American education. That includes sports."

One quirk is that DoDEA's funding comes via the Department of Defense, not the Department of Education. Consequently, its schools are exempt from No Child Left Behind (NCLB), though they follow the standards and curriculum set by the law.

In the primary grades at Lejeune, the student-teacher ratio is 18 to 1; throughout DoDEA, the ratio is 20 to 1 on average. Lejeune High School offers advanced classes in math and science, as well as honors English and world history. Advanced Placement classes are offered in 11 subjects. Two years of the same foreign language is a graduation requirement throughout DoDEA. "We want to ensure that our kids can meet the standards of learning in [any] state," Tafoya says. That's important, given that the normal military tour of duty is three years, and many dependents will move a staggering half-dozen times before they graduate from high school.

★★★

During recess, Hardesty watches her students as they burn energy on the monkey bars, swings, slide, and basketball court, seemingly oblivious to the attack helicopters hovering above the nearby pine trees as soldiers shimmy up and down ropes. "See it all the time," Hardesty shrugs. Some base schools have soundproof glass to help buffer the noise from aircraft engines on nearby runways.

Such is life at Lejeune, where 139,000 Marines, sailors, retirees, family members, and civilian employees work. But remove the camouflage vehicles from the road, and the base resembles a mixed-use, albeit gated, suburban community. It even has a slight rush hour. But its Domino's Pizza and Burger King coexist with 77 live-fire ranges, 43 miles of railroad tracks, and 10 fire stations.

Military families don't earn high salaries. Most of the students at Lejeune qualify for free and reduced-price lunches. But paychecks are steady and can be stretched far beyond the limits of civilians in the same income bracket. For example, military families enjoy reduced prices at the base department and grocery stores, hair salons, and dry cleaners. Families also have access to decent housing and high-quality health and dental care, as well as fully equipped gymnasiums, playgrounds, and recreation centers.

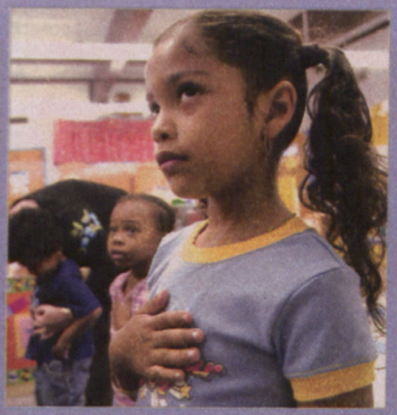
Alicia Mauro lives three blocks from Tarawa Terrace. While carrying her infant daughter, Mauro walks her oldest son, Anthony, 4, and his 3-year-old brother, Patrick, to school each day. "We have a strong sense of community here," says Mauro, whose husband is in Iraq. "My husband can do his job better knowing we are safe. Everything we need is on base."

Base living can be a comfortable and fulfilling life for military families, of which many are ethnic minorities. On-base

NEA's 51st State Turns 51

Association members working on military bases belong to the Federal Education Association (FEA), sometimes known as "NEA's 51st state." The FEA represents faculty and staff working within the Department of Defense school system. Headquartered at NEA in Washington, D.C., FEA is a global organization serving more than 6,000 educators in Europe, Asia, the United States, and its territories. FEA is a state affiliate of NEA that was started in 1956 when a group of educators in Germany became upset over a Pentagon plan to shut schools down early in order to save money. They organized to form the Overseas Education Association (OEA). In 1994, the name was changed to FEA. It is the recognized labor organization for DoDEA employees, having nine board members who represent Europe, Pacific, and "Stateside" districts.

PHOTOS: STEPHANIE BRUCE



From left: **Hardesty** and students in step. All teachers living off base must pass the "guard shack" to and from school. Hardesty and **Laura Hastings** (right), Lejeune Education Association president, attend a union meeting. Emma and classmates practice proper flag etiquette.

schools reflect the same ethnic diversity as most urban schools. "DoDEA is color-blind," Tafoya says. "A lot of our success has to do with teacher expectations."

Parental expectations are also high. Along with e-mailing assignments to parents serving overseas—"so when they talk to their kid, they can ask about homework," Tayofa says—DoDEA also broadcasts graduation ceremonies and other school events live via satellite around the world.

DoDEA's global reach has produced a worldwide alumni network. Graduates scattered across the globe stay in touch through a variety of Web sites, including Military Brats Registry, Overseas Brats, and Military Brats Meetup.

★★★

Camp Lejeune has six elementary schools, a middle school, and a high school. Admission is limited to the 3,300 dependent children of military parents living in permanent housing at Camp Lejeune. Dependents who live with their families off base attend local public schools.

Like Hardesty, many of the 630 teachers, teacher's aides, education support professionals, and substitutes at Lejeune are military spouses. "We know how to relate to what students are going through when their dad or mom is deployed," Hardesty says. "We've all been there."

Hardesty has been there more than most. She was born at Lejeune while her Marine father was stationed there in the 1970s. Hardesty has a civilian brother, but her two sisters married military men; a nephew is also in the service. When her father, Capt. Jack Renegar, retired in 1976, her family had amassed 140 years of military service—more than any family in U.S. history, according to news accounts. Her husband, Master Sgt. Daniel Hardesty, is currently stationed in Okinawa, Japan. Before his transfer, the couple purchased a house in Jacksonville where they hope to retire alongside Hardesty's parents. "We decided to be apart for now, with my teaching job and our house here," she says.

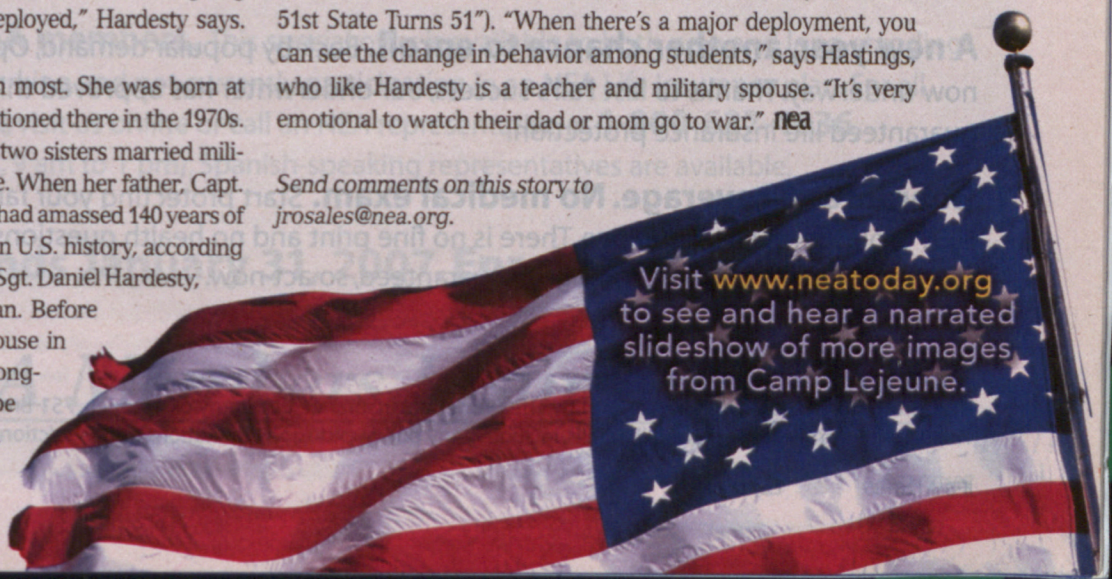
Dealing with separation is part of military life. Marines like to say that "home is where the Corps sends you." When it's one of the world's hot spots where warriors die, flag etiquette takes on a more sober meaning. Hardesty, like all Lejeune teachers, is prepared to discuss with students the significance of a flag-draped coffin. "They learn what that means," she says.

While the fear of losing a parent is always present, "the day-to-day issues involve young families who are away from their hometowns," says Marty Pitcarin, one of three full-time school psychologists serving Lejeune schools. Programs like Club USA help children learn to cope with being separated from parents.

Alicia Mauro recalls how hard her husband's deployment was on her 4-year-old son, Anthony. "Nighttime was a hard time, because his dad would put him to bed," she says. A school program encouraged Anthony to write down his feelings and then talk with a counselor, who took notes. "He'd come home from school with paperwork describing his emotions and thoughts," she says. "It helped me know how to talk with him."

Staffers also work hard to provide their own support. "You only have each other," says Laura Hastings, president of the 200-member Lejeune Education Association (LEA), which, along with the Lejeune Education Support Association (LESA) is part of the NEA-affiliated Federal Education Association (see "NEA's 51st State Turns 51"). "When there's a major deployment, you can see the change in behavior among students," says Hastings, who like Hardesty is a teacher and military spouse. "It's very emotional to watch their dad or mom go to war." nea

Send comments on this story to jrosales@nea.org.



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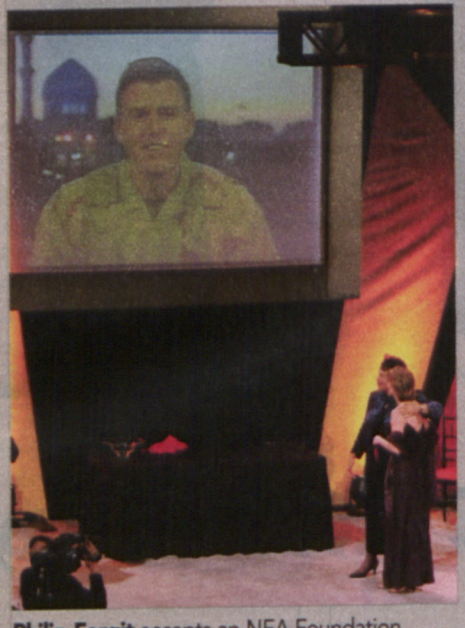
A Teacher, No Matter Where

When NEA Foundation award winner and U.S. Navy reservist Philip Forgit was sent to Iraq, he found himself in surprisingly familiar territory.

The students sitting in front of Virginia teacher Philip Forgit couldn't read or write, so he did what any good educator would do: he found a way to help them. But this was no ordinary class. Forgit was in Iraq, and his students were members of that country's fledgling military.

A U.S. Navy reservist called to active duty, Forgit was responsible for readying the soldiers for their new military duties. When he realized they couldn't read or write their own language, he knew the first lesson would have to be literacy training. So in addition to his regular military duties as an advisor to the Iraqi army, he used local contacts to find an Iraqi teacher willing to take on the risk of working with the U.S. military. Forgit set up a one-room schoolhouse, complete with textbooks and posters. The students helped select the school's name—the Mind and Rifle School—and its logo melding scholarship and military duty.

"I found I was able to use my skill sets as a teacher in Iraq," Forgit says. "Students have different learning styles, just as different cultures have different learning styles. As a teacher, I was very sensitive to that." Pleased with the results, military officials replicated the literacy school elsewhere.



Philip Forgit accepts an NEA Foundation award for teaching, via satellite from Iraq.

Devising unique ways to engage students comes naturally to Forgit, a fourth-grade teacher now winding up his tour of duty as the winner of the 2005 NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence. It was his enthusiasm and relentless creativity that caught the eye of Foundation judges. "Tectonic Tex"—one of many educational characters brought to life in the classroom by a singing and dancing Forgit—has become so popular that he's performed at concerts for thousands of children throughout Virginia, starred in a movie, and had a day named after him by the city council.

Forgit's leadership and organizing prowess were evident while serving as president in two locals, doubling one's membership and helping secure salary increases and significant health care benefit subsidies for both districts' teachers. He even ran for the Virginia House of Delegates in 2003, on a pro-public education platform. Small wonder, then, that Virginia Education Association President Princess Moss recalls, "[when] I first heard that Philip was being called up, I cried."

That call from the Navy came in August 2005. "All you had to do was look at the news to know it was coming," Forgit says. He had to report for duty on the first day of school that year. So, on the night he was recognized by the Foundation for his teaching work, Forgit was not in the packed ballroom with his wife, other finalists, and such high-profile guests as former President Bill Clinton. Instead, he was in full gear on the roof of the Palestine Hotel in Baghdad, waiting for a satellite hookup in which he would surprise those back in Washington with a live acceptance speech. "It was surreal," says Forgit, recalling looking down at the wreckage of a car bomb that had targeted the hotel while waiting for the announcement from NEA President Reg Weaver.

Forgit returned from Iraq this past summer, ready to tackle new challenges and fund-raise on the NEA Foundation's behalf. Earning the award was not only recognition of his hard work in the classroom but also a powerful motivating force. "The award provides an incentive to ask 'What can I do now? How can I top that?'" he says.

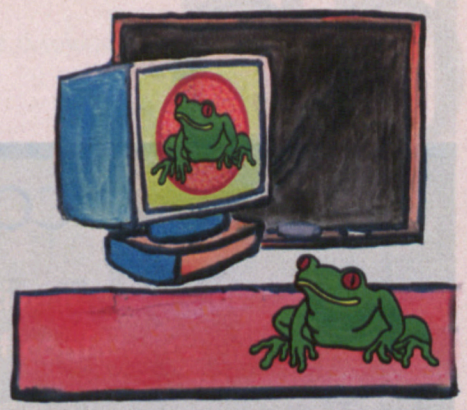
In answer to his own question, he's already got something in mind: Mr. Forgit's Field Trip. He envisions a TV show in which American students ask questions of their counterparts in other countries and vice versa. He is now building up interest in the show, explaining its potential to increase students' global awareness—something a man who has seen war firsthand believes is crucial.

—CYNTHIA KOPKOWSKI

Visit www.neatoday.org for a multimedia presentation on the NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence winner. Have an idea you think will make a difference? The Foundation offers grants worth up to $5,000. The application deadline is Feb. 1. Visit www.neafoundation.org for more.

PHOTO: JUAN CARLOS BRICENO/FOTO BRICENO

Are virtual dissection simulations an acceptable substitute for real animal specimens?



YES Virtual dissection should be the only option. More students are choosing not to dissect once-living animals, and in some states, that choice is allowed by law. By providing virtual dissections, students don't need to make ethical choices, and research shows that learning outcomes are as good or better with humane teaching resources. More than 6 million animals suffer needlessly for high school dissections. There's nothing humane about prematurely ending a life and then using it "for science."

I am a special education teacher. As a good educator, I'm required to adapt my lessons to meet the different needs of my students. Science teachers should do the same. Not all students are destined to become scientists, and to force them to participate in a distasteful and morally objectionable exercise is not giving young people the respect for their principles and opinions that they deserve.

Humans can choose to donate their bodies to science, but animals have no voice other than ours or our students'. Virtual dissection may not allow for the individual nuances found in real organs, but is a nuance worth a life? One may say that refusing to dissect animals is an emotional choice rather than an intellectual one; regardless of one's opinion, I don't believe children should be put in the position to choose intellect over heart for a grade.

LESA PENNINGTON is a special education teacher at Cactus Shadows High School in Cave Creek, Arizona.

NO Virtual dissection falls short in the experiential aspects provided by real specimens. Students learn better when they understand and can see the primitive structure of a frog's lungs, or the fat lining in a cat's abdomen. They know the texture of these organs and tissues by color and touch, understand what they do, and are able to make inferences and speculate about other species.

It is scientifically important to examine the structure and function of living and once-living organisms. The smell, feel, and texture cannot be duplicated in a virtual dissection.

There are some students who raise ethical questions, but usually their arguments are poorly formed. As a scientist, I cannot fathom a nobler fate for an animal than to be a part of the scientific education process. It is our education that helps us pass on the feelings, thoughts, and beliefs that guide responsible interaction with nature.

Replacing dissection with virtual dissection artificially fragments the life and death "rules" of biology from actual science. Coping with and understanding feelings about life and death is just as important as the study of living things and a necessary requirement of any biological scientist. In the case of our students, it is something that they need to have learned in school before pursuing science at higher levels. Virtual understanding is inadequate.

CHRISTOPHER PERILLO is president of the Kenosha Education Association and has taught several science classes at Indian Trail Academy in Kenosha, Wisconsin.

OTHER VOICES

Here's what other educators are saying on our message boards. Join the debate by visiting www.nea.org/debate.

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY no reason in this day and age for K–12 students to dissect other creatures of this planet. Computer software (simulations or video of actual dissections) can fill that need easily.
BRAD PASSENGER, Lane School District, Springfield, Oregon

BY USING A VIRTUAL dissection, students are removed from reality as they gather information and take a look around inside. The virtual information may be highly accurate, but one can't get the physical feel and smell. Students don't have the same sense of this animal once being alive and moving, with the need for food and shelter. Biology should not be only the anatomy of the animal, but also a respect for the living creature.
SUNNY STORY, Grant Early Childhood Center, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

WITH A VIRTUAL animal specimen, everything is the same inside with no differences. Learning about the differences in animals/human bodies is important in science today. New research, new procedures, new inventions in the medical field come about with studies of real animal specimens.
COLLEEN BARTJEN, Mount Prospect School District, Mount Prospect, Illinois

WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?

Do students learn better in single-sex classrooms? Join our next debate and see your name in print! We'll choose from among the discussion board responses for an upcoming issue of *NEA Today*. Visit www.nea.org/debate.

ILLUSTRATIONS: GETTY IMAGES

COOL IDEA

That's a Wrap!

For their first art project, my seventh-graders create life-size sculptures of themselves by wrapping their entire bodies (heads not included) in packing tape. Working in gender-specific groups of four to eight students, the kids start by wrapping a first layer of packing tape, sticky side out, around a classmate's body. Then they wrap the next layer sticky side down. They build the sculpture in sections—bottom and top halves of the body—using a volleyball as a mold for the head. When each section is finished, they cut the tape down the side and carefully remove the molded figure. Then they tape the sections together to make one life-size sculpture. One group of students even made a sculpture sitting in the pose of Rodin's "The Thinker."

The kids get a huge kick out of this project, and there's a lot of laughing and collaboration. The sculptures not only produce amazing visual results, they're also a great team-building activity. Students come into my class not knowing each other, and it's amazing how they can connect with just a little tape!

TERRA KELLEY
Waukee, Iowa

TICKLED

Isn't It Obvious?

I was puzzled when a second-grader asked me why there were so many teachers in Pennsylvania after she and her family returned from a visit there. Before I could ask her what she thought teachers looked like, a little girl started waving her hands frantically and "ooohing" and "ohing" like crazy. When I called on her, she said, "I know! I know! I know why there are so many teachers in Pennsylvania!"

I couldn't wait for her answer. She calmly replied, "Well, duh, it is P-E-N-C-I-L-vania."

ROSEMARY VETRANO
Media specialist
Bloomfield, New Jersey

Perfect Punctuation

The other day, one of my first-graders was bursting with pride because he remembered to put a "pyramid" at the end of his sentence.

MEG NIXON
Albany, California

Getting Back on Track

To maintain effective classroom management upon returning to school after winter recess, I review and discuss school and classroom rules and behavior expectations with my second-grade students. Students have most likely spent the holidays visiting friends and relatives and have gotten away from the normal school routine. By reviewing class rules and routines, they are gently moved back into the swing of the school day. My students also work in cooperative learning groups to create collages of their favorite moments from the break. Rather than "clamping down" or "getting tough" on kids, I take advantage of their energy and excitement at the New Year and use it to my advantage!

JANINE RIGGINS
Atlantic City, New Jersey

Writing Resolutions

At the beginning of the new year, I discuss "resolutions" with my language arts classes. We talk about the benefits of making long-term goals and the advantages of planning and documenting them. I provide students with some official-looking paper, and they write their goals for the new year (in ink, of course!) and then sign them.

In past years, I collected the papers and returned them during the last week of school. They are good for reflection and for noting progress made, but this year I'm

PACKING TAPE SCULPTURES AND CLASS PHOTOS: COURTESY OF TERRA KELLEY; PYRAMID OF PENCILS: CREATIVE IMAGES; GIRL DOING BACK FLIP: RUBBERBALL

planning to keep them in the students' portfolios. I've used aged-looking paper and paper that has the appearance of "rolled scroll" for effect, but the importance really comes from the seriousness of the lesson.

KATHLEEN MCGINLEY
Seventh/Eighth-grade teacher
Alhambra, California

CONFIDENT KIDS!

What's your most effective method for boosting students' self-confidence?

ANSWER: In my more than 30 years' teaching experience, nothing has built students' self-confidence more than the use of service learning as an instructional strategy. Students learned rhyme schemes and created holiday cards for geriatric and pediatric patients. They shared their learning with younger students by creating "books" to read to them or writing book reports for them based on their own reading. They shared their learning about nutrition with other classes through homerooms. Service learning helps students understand the relevance of their lessons and helps them feel they are doing important work.

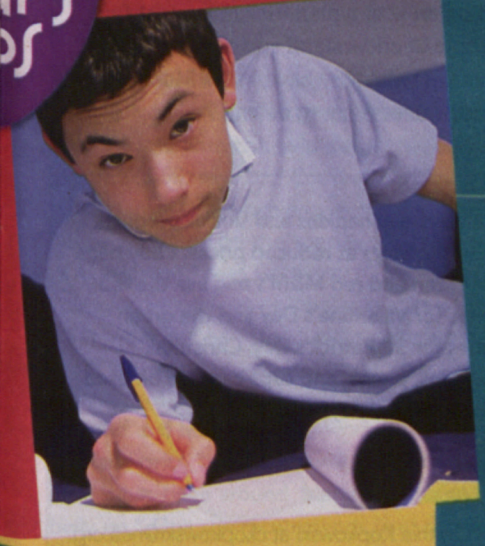
KATHIE MARSHALL
Literacy coach
Pacoima, California

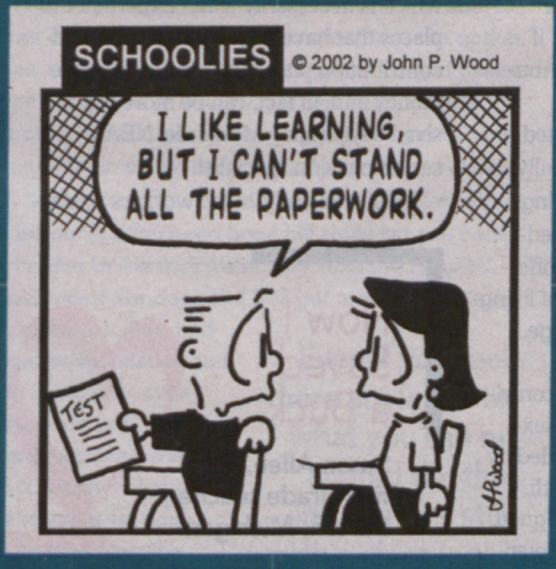
ANSWER: I learned a very effective method for boosting a child's confidence from the book, *Teaching Children of Poverty*. Talk about the child positively to another adult within earshot of the child. The secret is to talk loudly or across the room so that the students hear it. Your students will sit a little straighter when you talk about them.

EVE DUTKIEWICZ
Speech therapist
Kenosha, Wisconsin

ANSWER: This may be unrealistic for all grade levels, but I tell my second-graders I love them every single day. I tell the class as a whole, but more importantly, I make sure to tell them individually. When my students know I love them, it gives them the self-confidence to try things they normally wouldn't. I have not found any other way to instill self-confidence that beats this.

MANDY SPRINGER
Lansing, Michigan





Share your wisdom, ask your question!

What's your secret for maintaining momentum during the second half of the school year?

Send your answers to these or other questions on this page to **sholcomb@nea.org**. Or, send us a question you'd like to see posted. Please include your name, your job, and the community and state where you work.

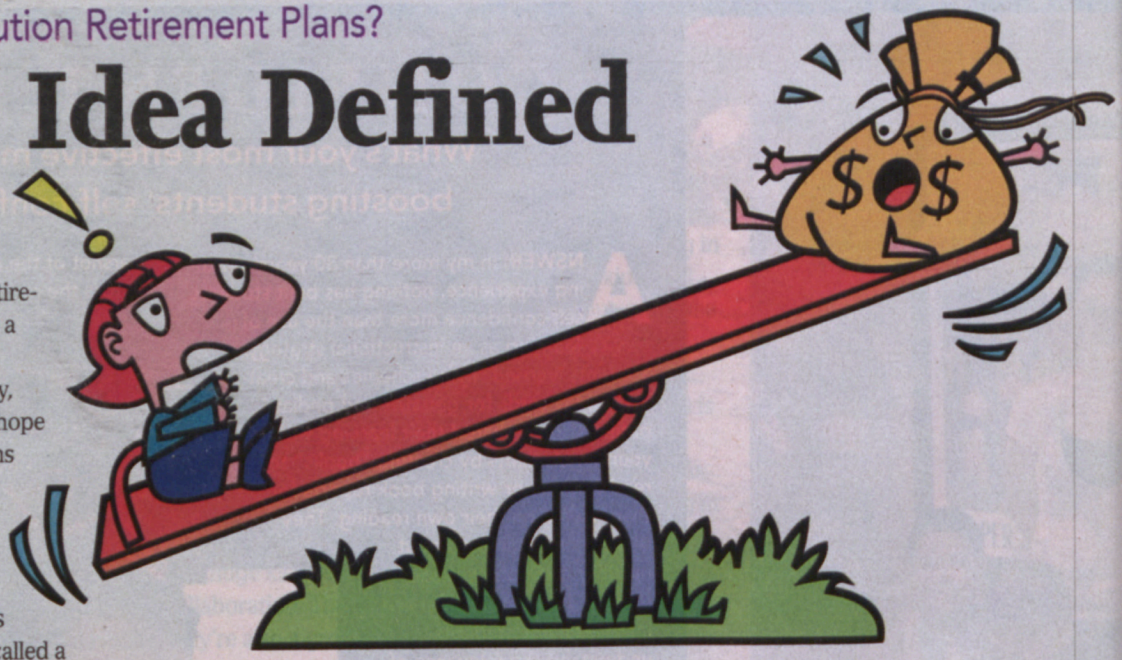
For a weekly e-mail of questions, answers, and practical classroom tips, join Works4Me, one of NEA's most popular and useful services. Just send the message "subscribe Works4Me" (without the quotation marks) to **Lyris@list.nea.org**.

GIRL SITTING AT DESK: THOMAS BARWICK; I LOVE YOU CHALK DRAWING: PHOTODISC; BOY WRITING: ADAM GAULT; SCHOOLIES CARTOON: JOHN P. WOOD

Defined-Contribution Retirement Plans?

A Bad Idea Defined

BY DEBORAH A. WILBURN



Thinking about retirement may not be a favorite pastime, but it is necessary, especially if you hope to file away your lesson plans permanently one day. The good news? You're likely among the 90 percent of all K–12 teachers and education support professionals who currently have what's called a defined-benefit plan. That can make the difference between having enough money in retirement and coming up short. Defined-benefit plans have several key characteristics:

PREDICTABILITY. You know how much of a monthly benefit you will receive at retirement age, making it easier to plan for the future. The benefit is typically calculated according to a formula based on years of service and final average salary.

SECURITY. The benefit is guaranteed for the rest of your life.

EXPERT MONEY MANAGEMENT. The funds put into the plan on your behalf by your employer (and you, if your plan requires employee contributions) are professionally managed.

LOW EXPENSES. Fees associated with having the money professionally managed are low, increasing earnings.

EXTRA BENEFITS. Many defined-benefit plans are comprehensive, offering additional perks such as cost of living adjustments, retiree health coverage, disability, and early retirement.

The alternative is the defined-contribution plan. These are individual, tax-deferred investment accounts funded by the employer, the employee, or both, depending on how the plan is designed. However, it's up to employees to determine how that money will be invested. As a supplemental investment product, they can be a useful tool. But if a state decides to offer a defined-contribution plan to fund employee pensions, the balance in educators' accounts when they leave—especially in states that are not part of Social Security—could represent their entire retirement package. Judging by how poorly the majority of participants fare with these plans, many are in danger of reaching retirement with nowhere near adequate money.

When politicians make noises about converting public employees to a defined-contribution plan, it's usually promoted as a cost-saving measure that workers are clamoring for—neither of which is necessarily true. "Experience in places that have converted to a defined-contribution plan shows it doesn't save money and, in fact, can be more expensive," says Nancy McKenzie, NEA's senior pension specialist.

Unfortunately, some workers mistakenly assume they stand to gain from employee-managed plans. "People think, 'My employer is putting 10 percent of my pay into a defined-benefit plan, I'd rather have that in my own account,'" says McKenzie. But, "usually the employer contribution is lower when the conversion is made, because the idea is to save the employer money."

If you hear that your state legislature is considering changing your defined-benefit to a defined-contribution plan, it's important to take a stand. NEA has developed a tool kit, "Protecting the Retirement Security of NEA Members," available at www.nea.org/retired/tools/publications.html. It has research, more resources, and concrete steps for developing an action plan. "It's important for people to understand and appreciate the value of what they have," says McKenzie. And, if necessary, to defend it.

How I Saved a Buck

Susan Allen,
first-grade teacher,
Burton, Michigan

I always buy napkins and similar products after holidays at reduced prices. I buy bags of green and red M&M's and use the red ones for Valentine's Day and the green ones for St. Patrick's Day. Christmas napkins, plates, and cups can also be used for these holidays.

Got a great way to save some cash? E-mail Cynthia Kopkowski at ckopkowski@nea.org.

TOP ILLUSTRATION: RAYMOND MEDICI; BOTTOM ILLUSTRATION: R

Resolved for 2007:
Start Saving Now!

It's a new year, and there's no better time to review your finances and consider where you might make improvements. Teachers and other school personnel should pay special attention to their retirement savings, says financial expert John O'Brien of O'Brien Capital Management Inc. in Nyack, New York. "In early January, I try to educate my clients about how to change their contributions to maximize their account balances," he says. Even if they benefit from a defined-benefit retirement plan (see "A Bad Idea Defined"), educators should also try to set aside supplemental funds in a tax-deferred 403(b) plan or IRA account. "It's the one way to really build wealth," he says. "And it's important to start when you're young. This is when you can take advantage of the power of compound interest, which makes your money grow over time."

That said, O'Brien has a few guidelines for making such investments. If your school district offers 403(b) accounts, consider the options within the plan before investing your money. Educate yourself about features and fees, including early withdrawal penalties. If the offerings in your district's plan are not what you're looking for, consider opening an IRA or a Roth IRA. With a traditional IRA, taxes on your contributions and earnings are deferred until withdrawn in retirement. With a Roth IRA, you invest money on an after-tax basis and your earnings are completely tax-free when withdrawn in retirement. There are income limits on who can invest in traditional IRAs and Roth IRAs; check with your accountant or the IRS Web site (www.irs.gov) to see if you qualify.

www.neamb.com

I Spent How Much?

A look at the big and small ways the country spends its money on diet products and fast food

$55.5 BILLION
Amount Americans spend annually on weight loss products and services, health foods and beverages, and dietary supplements.

$110 BILLION
Amount they spend annually on fast food.

SOURCES: CNBC; ERIC SCHLOSSER, *FAST FOOD NATION*.

Is It Worth It? Pet Insurance

It's bad enough worrying about your own health insurance. But with veterinarians now able to diagnose and treat conditions ranging from cataracts to cancer, pet owners have the option of approving costly treatments should their furry friend get sick. If you're the type of owner who would do anything to care for your pet, this type of insurance makes a lot of sense.

Even if you feel there are limits to what you can or should do for an ailing pet, the insurance is still worth a close look. Say your dog got a urinary tract infection requiring an emergency vet visit, the bill for which can easily hit $300, or your cat broke a leg. You would likely seek medical help, and pet insurance can help defray the cost. For example, a fractured bone bill could set you back about $2,250, says Lori Corriveau, a clinician at Purdue University's Veterinary Teaching Hospital.

Pet insurance premiums start at about $19 per month for dogs and $12 per month for cats. "They are based on the species, age of the pet, where you live, and plan selected," says Corriveau. Optional coverage for vaccination and routine care coverage is also available, and some companies even offer avian and exotic pet plans covering reptiles, birds, and others.

Even if you feel there are limits to what you can or should do, the insurance is still worth a close look.

If you decide to go this route, choosing among plans requires careful consideration of what your money buys. "Consider what is covered and how the paperwork is submitted, exclusions for your pet, and price," says Corriveau. "Most important is how long the insurer has been around. Many have come on the market and gone belly up." One she recommends (and has no affiliation with) is Veterinary Pet Insurance, a 25-year-old company that writes 80 percent of the nation's pet insurance policies. Fido might thank you.

PHOTOS TOP: DON FARRALL; DUMBBELLS: PIOTR PRZESZIO; FRENCH FRIES: BORA UCAK; PET ILLUSTRATION: VALLENTIN VASSILEFF

Rocket Man

He soars through the air with the greatest of ease, he's a teacher released from the force of the g's.

WHEN OFFERED THE RARE CHANCE to experience the feeling of being weightless in space, Virginia high school teacher Alex Turner (shown upside down) seized the opportunity. Last fall, about 240 lucky fliers from in and around Washington, D.C.; Huntsville, Alabama; San Diego; and Cleveland boarded specially modified Boeing 727s for Northrop Grumman's inaugural Weightless Flights of Discovery program.

Designed to get educators excited about teaching science or touting science careers, the program included pre-flight workshops in which they crafted experiments for the flight. Then came the main event: Following the path of a parabola—think of an upside-down U—the flying educators became weightless for approximately 25 seconds at a time. The aircraft rose and fell 15 times over two hours.

Turner teaches government at Reston, Virginia's, South Lakes High School. Because he volunteers at the National Air and Space Museum's Steven F. Udvar-Hazy Center in nearby Chantilly, Virginia, program organizers thought he was a natural for the trip. His experiment required fastening a clear plastic bag filled with materials to the side of the aircraft and filming its movement amid intense 1.8 g-forces and during weightlessness.

"When you went weightless, you didn't realize it until there was no floor below you," Turner chuckles. "When I stood up, it was more than enough force to bounce my head against the ceiling."

—NATALIE McGILL

PEOPLE POLL

When you look back on 2007, what's the one thing you most want to be able to say?

I got healthier—51%, I socked a little extra money away—28%, I fell in love for the first time, or all over again—10%, I carved out more time to enjoy my hobbies—9%, I learned how to program my TiVo and get my cell phone to stop beeping for no reason—2%

Head to www.neatoday.org to vote in February's poll:

What's your dream Valentine's Day date?

Mom Helps Twin Stars Shine

Just being a mom has landed this California high school teacher in the newspapers.

FINALLY, THOSE EXTRA-LONG TWIN BEDS, ubiquitous in college dorms, will be put to good use. Deborah Ledford's twin sons Brook and Robin Lopez are 7-foot freshmen basketball players attending Stanford on full scholarships this year. Even if you're not a basketball fan, you'll likely see these guys by the time March Madness rolls around. (Brook suffered a herniated disk last summer but was expected to recover by tournament season.) Says *USA Today* in its pre-season report: "The Lopez twins will be excellent."

To hear mom—herself a 6-foot-plus Stanford alum—tell it, there's nothing unusual about raising twin basketball stars and two other boys as a single parent while teaching high school math and German.

"I don't consider what I do special," says Ledford. "It's normal. Millions of other parents are providing opportunities and good values, bringing their kids to sports, museums, national parks."

Now that Ledford is done reading bedtime stories, playing math and geography games, and managing the intense sports scheduling for her sons, she plans to take road trips in Canada and Europe. And of course to Stanford. "I'm going to see as many of my boys' basketball games as I can."

—REBECCA L. WEBER

PHOTO TOP: ZERO GRAVITY CORPORATION; BOTTOM: GARY KAZANJIAN

Where in the World Is Joan Price?

The itinerary: 23 cities, 12 countries, and six continents—all in only five months.

WHILE TEACHING, Joan Price knew it was important to expose her special education students to different cultures and lands, so she took her third-graders at Ohio's C.R. Coblentz School on virtual trips around the world with international literature, food, and art projects. Once she retired, Price (Ohio Education Association-Retired, shown at right) and fellow teacher Bev Bartczak decided to put that theory into practice, visiting the countries they had been teaching about for years.

"We both love to travel and experience other cultures, and we wanted to stay connected with children after our retirement at the end of the past school year," Price says. The two designed a Web site where students can follow their journey, which took six months to plan. "The rule was to travel in one direction and to cross each ocean only once," Price says. "We chose places where we had teacher contacts, places that sounded interesting or exotic, and places we had visited and wished to see more of."

Their journey kicked off in Italy. Eleven other countries followed in quick succession, including India, Australia, the Northern Mariana Islands, Tibet, and Tahiti. Homecoming is planned for January 29 in Cleveland.

And it wasn't enough to just buy plane tickets for those far-flung locales. Price and Bartczak also had to plan the itinerary within each country. Eschewing large tours, they opted instead for staying in homes and private tours. They're also mixing in school visits in Uganda, Egypt, China, Vietnam, and Peru, among others. An Italian primary school was their first visit. "It was very small—one teacher, 10 students," Price says. "The teacher spoke no English, but showed us a very basic classroom and well-equipped computer lab."

As they travel, they're e-mailing stories and photos back to their former Sandusky, Ohio, school district, where staff upload them to their travel diary Web site. It has classroom resources, including historical and geographical information, a video of dancing students in Uganda, and activities to help students learn about each country. Check out the link at www.neatoday.org.

—MISHRI SOMESHWAR

Entrepreneurial ESP

This Missouri warehouse employee knows a thing or two (or 3,000) about sales. Just ask him about the wedding dresses.

AT A KANSAS City clothing boutique liquidation sale a few years ago, John Stamp had an epiphany. He was there to buy the defunct store's shelving, but they were also selling $3,000 wedding dresses for a few hundred dollars. "I decided to buy a couple of hundred dresses," he says. He sold them out of his house for a profit. "Two years later, people still knock on my door asking if I have more dresses," he says.

Although that was his most unique salvage-turned-sale, it was not the first such experience for Stamp, a school district warehouse employee. He began when he was 13. "There's something so exciting about taking things that are undervalued and reselling them to people who want them," he says. He has sold everything from tools to lingerie, and used the money to repair his car and pay for his children's college education.

Stamp's salvaging philosophy is to keep it small. "I'd rather sell 10,000 roller springs to some painters I know than hold out and sell them on a larger market, like eBay." Although it's a fun hobby, Stamp says that he has no plans to turn salvaging into a full-time job. "It's a tough way to make a living, and I'm just having more fun this way."

—MISHRI SOMESHWAR

GOT A TIP?

Look for these and other People items at **www.neatoday.org**. E-mail your story tips to Cynthia Kopkowski at **ckopkowski@nea.org**.

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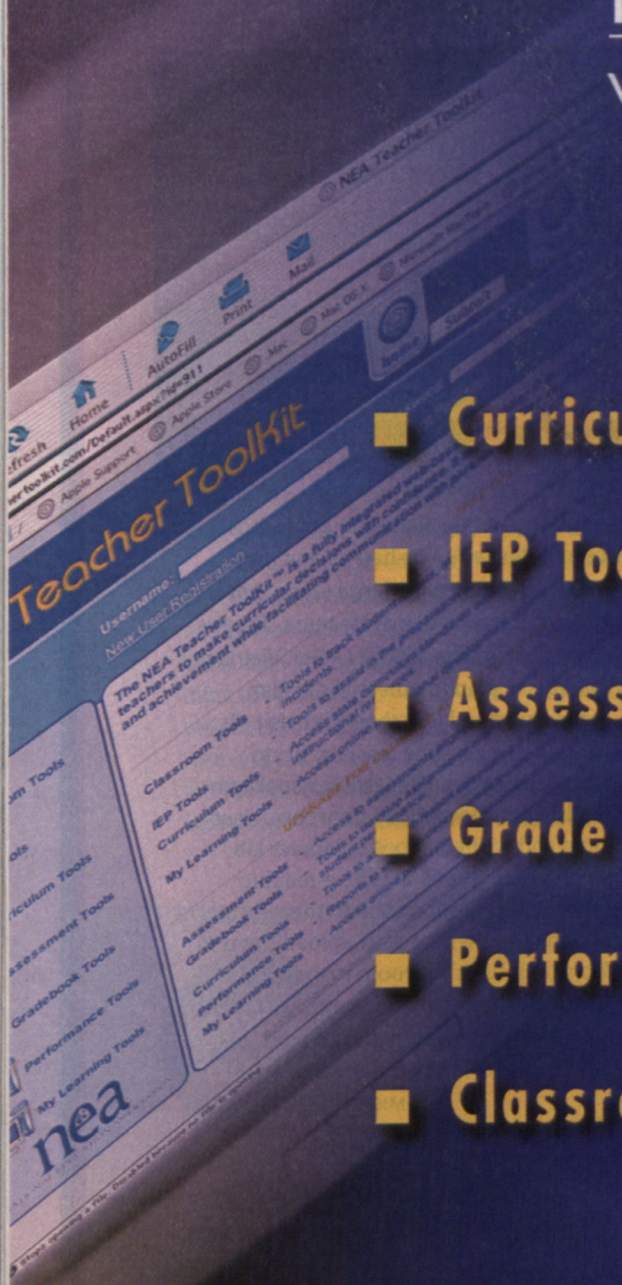

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54 **Grants & Awards** Essay contest encourages youngsters to learn from their elders.
55 **Take Note** A unique curriculum teaches the history of the labor movement.
56 **In Print** "High-flying" manual helps young people identify strengths and choose careers.
56 **Member Books** A tomboy struggles to find her place in a straightlaced family.
59 **Heads Up from NEA Member Benefits** Consolidate debt or fund a college education with a Personal Loan® account.
59 **NEA's Read Across America** We're updating "Educators' Top 100 Books for Children"—tell us about your favorites.
60 **On TV** Watch the first in-depth program to profile the Supreme Court.
61 **Diversity Calendar** January 22–26 is No Name-Calling Week.
62 **On the Web** Science teachers can download a new coral reef ecosystems guide.

Awards Encourage Students To Help Solve Critical Health Problems

The Young Epidemiology Scholars (YES) program is a competition that awards nearly $500,000 annually to high school juniors and seniors who develop research projects using the principles of epidemiology—the branch of medicine that deals with the study of causes, distribution, and control of disease among populations—to advance understanding of critical public health-related issues.

YES competitors develop a research question and hypothesis about an important health issue. They gather and analyze data, present results, and suggest ways to problem-solve. Past projects have addressed issues such as childhood obesity, HIV/AIDS, childhood asthma, teen pregnancy, and health and substance abuse. Projects are judged by a panel of leading epidemiologists and educators, and finalists are selected to present their research to a panel of leaders in the field of public health at the national YES Competition in Washington, D.C. Two top winners each receive $50,000 in college scholarships.

ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES

For more information, visit **www.collegeboard.com/yes**. The deadline to apply is 5 p.m., **February 1, 2007**.

DEADLINE APPROACHING FOR NEA FOUNDATION GRANTS

APPLICATIONS ARE DUE BY FEBRUARY 1, 2007, FOR BOTH THE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GRANTS AND THE LEARNING & LEADERSHIP GRANTS.

THE NEA FOUNDATION
www.neafoundation.org

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT GRANTS provide $5,000 to improve the academic achievement of students by engaging in critical thinking and problem-solving activities that deepen knowledge of standards-based subject matter. The work should also improve students' habits of inquiry, self-directed learning, and critical reflection.

LEARNING & LEADERSHIP GRANTS provide opportunities for K–12 teachers, education support professionals, and higher education faculty and staff to engage in high-quality professional development and lead their colleagues in professional growth. The grant amount is $2,000 for individuals and $5,000 for groups engaged in collegial study.

Grants to individuals fund participation in high-quality professional development experiences, such as summer institutes or action research.

Grants to groups fund collegial study, including study groups, action research, lesson study, or mentoring experiences for faculty or staff new to an assignment.

Recipients will be notified by June 15, 2007. Grants fund activities for 12 months from the award date.

Visit **www.neafoundation.org** today for more information, including guidelines and applications, or call **(202) 822-7840**.

NEA-SATURN/UAW PARTNERSHIP AWARDS

NEA, Saturn Corporation, and United Auto Workers (UAW) are soliciting applications describing outstanding new teacher induction programs that are created and sustained through joint efforts by the school district and the union, and that have resulted in substantially assisting new teachers in their education careers. Applicants must have a strong mentoring program, plus at least two of these components:

DIFFERENTIATED staffing for novice teachers
COMMON planning time
ONGOING professional development
ACCESS to an external network of teachers
STANDARDS-BASED evaluation.

Six winners will be recognized during the NEA Board of Directors meeting at the start of the 2007 Representative Assembly (RA) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and in their home districts. Winners will also be invited to visit with Saturn and UAW during American Education Week in November 2007.

Winners will have the opportunity to share "best practices" with each other and the broader education community. Expenses to the RA and for the Saturn/UAW trip will be paid for one administration and one local Association representative. There is, however, no monetary grant associated with this award. The application deadline is **March 2, 2007**. Go to **www.nea.org/members/inductionaward.html** for information and a downloadable application.

GRANTS ADDRESS CHILDHOOD CANCER

Youth Service America offers A Lion in the House Community Service Grants. Complementing the highly acclaimed PBS film, these grants of $300 are designed for youth, ages 12–25, and youth-serving organizations (e.g., schools, youth groups, clubs) to design service projects addressing pediatric cancer. Projects should be youth-led and take place as part of National & Global Youth Service Day, April 20–22, 2007.

For information and to download an application, visit **www.ysa.org/awards/**. Applications must be postmarked by **February 1, 2007**. Learn more about pediatric cancer, including great service project ideas, at **www.MyLion.org**.

'WE THE PEOPLE' BOOKSHELF

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) has announced the fourth annual We the People Bookshelf, a program that offers sets of classic books to 2,000 community and school libraries throughout the United States. Recipients will receive a collection of 15 classics selected to illustrate this year's theme, "The Pursuit of Happiness." The awards are part of NEH's program to strengthen the teaching, study, and understanding of American history and culture.

Again this year, NEH has partnered with the American Library Association (ALA) to distribute a set of books, posters, and educational CDs to 2,000 selected libraries that offer the best programs for young readers using the awarded materials. Titles are preselected for grades K–3, 4–6, 7–8, and 9–12. As a bonus, each winning library will also receive a music CD, *Happy Land: Musical Tributes to Laura Ingalls Wilder*.

Find information and instructions online at **www.neh.gov**. Applications must be submitted by **January 31, 2007**.

DESIGN YOUR OWN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

With a fellow grant from the Fund for Teachers (FFT), preK–12 educators with at least three years of classroom experience who work at eligible schools can custom-design a summer experience that enriches their professional lives and helps them affect students on a daily basis. Grant fellows have designed a wide variety of learning experiences—from exploring volcanoes in Hawaii to studying the effect of chemicals on the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico; from a hands-on study of Beluga whales to a trek across Laos to learn about Hmong culture; from studying Islam through Morocco's political, social, and economic development to sharpening Spanish skills in Guatemala.

Grants fund up to $5,000 in expenses for individuals and $7,500 for teams of two or more. *But here's the catch:* because of funding limitations and availability of administrative partners, grants are not available in all areas. To find out if you work for a participating school or district, visit **www.fundforteachers.org**. The deadline for submitting an online application is **January 16, 2007**.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

LISTEN TO A LIFE ESSAY CONTEST

Get students thinking about their life goals and building closer connections across generations through this contest.

To enter, a student 8–18 years of age interviews a grandparent or "grandfriend" who is 50 years or older about their hopes and goals through life; how they achieved what they set out to do and overcame obstacles; or how dreams may have changed along the way. The student then writes a 300-word essay based on the interview.

The grand prize is a ThinkCentre computer and a $500 gift certificate from Books Are Fun. Twenty runner-up prizes include $200 gift certificates from Books Are Fun. All winners receive a framed certificate and a signed copy of *Dream*, the book by Susan V. Bosak that inspired the contest.

The deadline to enter is **March 31, 2007**. For complete rules and information, visit **www.legacyproject.org**.

Take Note

Free Toolkit Encourages Kids to Become Inventors

What do multi-positional training wheels, a hand-held stress toy for pediatric patients, and a chess game for three players have in common? They were invented by children, ages 5–12.

NEA has announced a partnership with By Kids For Kids that makes the company's Inventive Thinking Toolkit available to NEA members as a resource to excite kids about learning and inventing. The toolkit is designed to spur creative thinking using a project-based approach. Toolkits contain a teacher's guide, student guide, access to streaming video, and links to information about child inventors, past and present. The toolkits are targeted to reach K–12 students with a special appeal to grades 4–8. Coming soon: leveled lessons and student materials. The toolkits, lesson plans, and activities can be downloaded at www.bkfk.com. (While there, check out all the marvelous inventions by and for kids!)

NEA Friend of Education Award

The Friend of Education Award is the Association's highest honor and may be bestowed on an individual or organization whose leadership acts or support have significantly benefited education, education employees, or students on a national scale. This year, the deadline to nominate candidates for the award is April 2, 2007. Letters of nomination must include:

- NAME of the nominee
- NOMINEE'S position and/or organizational affiliation
- NOMINEE'S mailing address (or organization mailing address)
- NAME of the nominator or affiliate
- SIGNATURE of nominator or affiliate officer
- NAME of nominator's local affiliate, if applicable
- NOMINATOR'S mailing address and telephone number.

If the nominator is an NEA member, send proof of membership (e.g., an *NEA Today* mailing label with membership number).

In 100 words or less, indicate the reason for your nomination and summarize the nominee's qualifications for the award. Nominees will be evaluated based on leadership, acts, and support of education on a national scale. Supporting materials, such as publications or videos, may be submitted along with the nomination information. Submit all nomination information and materials to: NEA Friend of Education Award Committee; Executive Office; Attn: Joyce Parker; National Education Association; 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036. You may also fax nomination information to **(202) 822-7974**.

Teach the History of Labor

The United Teachers Los Angeles (NEA/AFT) Collective Bargaining Education Project is the only full-time secondary social studies program dedicated to teaching students about unions and the labor movement. It features lessons aligned with social studies standards that bring these labor issues alive:

- CONTEMPORARY labor-management contract negotiations
- UNION organizing campaigns
- IMPORTANT strikes in labor history
- A CASE STUDY on globalization in the clothing industry.

Teachers and students engage in problem-solving activities centered on issues of power and justice in the workplace, and students explore their rights, responsibilities, and possibilities in the world of work. Included are complete lesson materials, a CD-ROM, and video resources. The cost is $10. Make checks payable to United Teachers Los Angeles and mail to:

Collective Bargaining Education Project
c/o UTLA, 3303 Wilshire Blvd., 10th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90010

For more information, contact Linda Tubach at **(213) 386-3144** or cbep@lausd.k12.ca.us.

Mock Trials for Aspiring Lawyers

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation and the North Carolina Academy of Trial Lawyers invite qualifying high school students to compete against top finalists from all parts of the country in the second American Mock Trial Invitational (AMTI) May 2–4, 2007, at the New Jersey Law Center at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Contestants will have the opportunity to try a challenging case, enjoy a private dinner and educational tour at Ellis Island Immigration Museum in New York Harbor, and stay at a hotel in New Brunswick, a college town less than one hour from New York City. They will also receive certificates, suitable for documentation on college applications. The cost to register a team is $200. For more information, contact Sheila Boro at **(732) 937-7519** or sboro@njsbf.org. The deadline to register is April 6, 2007.

Free Poster-Sized Pamphlet on the American Revolution

Bring the men and women of days gone by to life with *American Revolution at a Glance*. The National Park Service and the Federal Citizen Information Center have teamed up to offer this free, poster-sized pamphlet that's filled with just enough information and a few simple maps to outline America's war for independence. There are three ways to get your publication:

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FROM SURVIVAL TO SOCIETY

Ten-year-old Moon Blake has spent his whole life in the wilderness and knows everything about survival and living off the land. But his father's death forces Moon to enter the modern world, where he battles authorities and finds his first friends among other "wards of the state." In Watt Key's ***Alabama Moon***, the main character's voice rings true—a young boy just beginning to learn about humanity, love, and friendship. Ages 10 and up. $17. 240 pp. from Farrar, Straus and Giroux. To order, go to www.fsgkidsbooks.com.

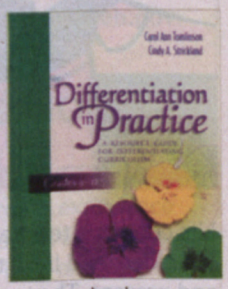
LEAPING INTO THE FUTURE

Based on the best-selling version for adults, ***What Color Is Your Parachute? For Teens: Discovering Yourself, Defining Your Future*** helps high school and college-age students identify their favorite skills to get the most from their education and prepare for their dream job. Includes exercises, worksheets, and stories of young people who have found their own unique paths. 167 pp. $14.95 from Ten Speed Press. To order, go to www.tenspeed.com.

HEAVEN ON EARTH

Yangsook Choi's ***Peach Heaven*** tells the true tale of a storm that flooded her town and orchards in Puchon, Korea. The waters sent peaches swirling through the streets, where Yangsook and her family—too poor to buy the precious fruit—gathered them and ate to their hearts' content. But later, Yangsook worried about the peach farmers, and organized a rescue mission to save the fruit. A gentle tale of an awakening conscience. Ages 4–8. 32 pp. $16 from Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Go to www.fsgkidsbooks.com to order.

YOU CAN DIFFERENTIATE IN THE CLASSROOM



How do teachers incorporate differentiation principles and strategies? In ***Differentiation in Practice: A Resource Guide for Differentiating Curriculum, Grades 9–12***, authors Carol Ann Tomlinson and Cindy Strickland present annotated lesson plans, sample assignments, learning contracts, rubrics, and homework handouts, plus advice on flexible grouping and other strategies, all while highlighting the underlying standards. 369 pp. $31.95 from ASCD. To order, go to www.ascd.org.

BOOKS BY NEA MEMBERS

THE HUNGRY PUA'A AND THE SWEET SWEET POTATO

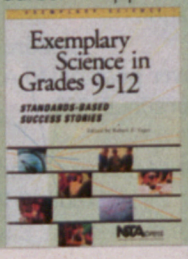
Written and Illustrated by Leonard Villanueva

In this tale from Hawaii, a very hungry pig chances upon a very sweet potato and decides to show off. He taunts his hungry neighbors with his good fortune, but when he settles down to eat, the sweet potato turns out to be not so sweet after all. What's missing? Maybe friendship and sharing make life sweet! Can the *pua'a* make amends? Ages 4–8. 24 pp. $14.95 from BeachHouse Publishing, LLC. To order, go to www.beachhousepublishing.com.

EXEMPLARY SCIENCE IN GRADES 9–12: STANDARDS-BASED SUCCESS STORIES

Edited by Robert Yager

In this collection of 15 essays, high school educators describe programs they've developed to fulfill National Science Education Standards. These are real-life examples to ponder as you consider how to carry out reforms in teaching, assessment, professional development, and content. There is wide variety in the approaches, yet all inspire and illustrate progress toward compliance with NSES standards. 191 pp. $19.95 from NSTA Press. To order, go to www.nsta.org.



EDITH ELLEN EDDY

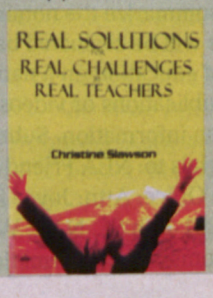
By Julee Ann Granger

Meet Edith Ellen Eddy, who "had freckles on her nose, a smile as bright as sunshine, and dirt between her toes." If you haven't gathered, Edith Ellen is a tomboy. She likes spiders, baseball cards, and the feel of earth beneath her feet. But *not* dresses, dolls, or tea parties. And surely not acting ladylike, the way her mother wants her to be. Can Edith Ellen's mother love her just as she is? A cautionary tale for all ages. 35 pp. $16.95 from Greene Bark Press. Go to www.greenebarkpress.com to order.

REAL SOLUTIONS FOR REAL CHALLENGES BY REAL TEACHERS

By Christine Slawson

This "in the trenches" approach to problem-solving offers practical interventions from NEA members that address a variety of behavioral challenges faced by educators everywhere—from bullying to tantrums, from fidgeting to talkativeness, including behaviors associated with clinically diagnosed conditions. These strategies have been tested and put to use by experienced educators. 384 pp. $24.99 from Authorhouse. Go to www.authorhouse.com.



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NEA & The Tom Joyner Foundation

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During the 2005-2006 school year, the Foundation provided financial assistance and NEA provided technical assistance and expertise to nearly 300 teachers in seven states supporting their participation in coursework and workshops. The program also paid for materials and individual tutoring to help teachers prepare for state licensure examinations.

Today, the partnership is looking to increase the number of participating Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and expand the program to help more teachers obtain full licensure.

Stay tuned for updated information via the *NEA Today* and the NEA website www.nea.org.

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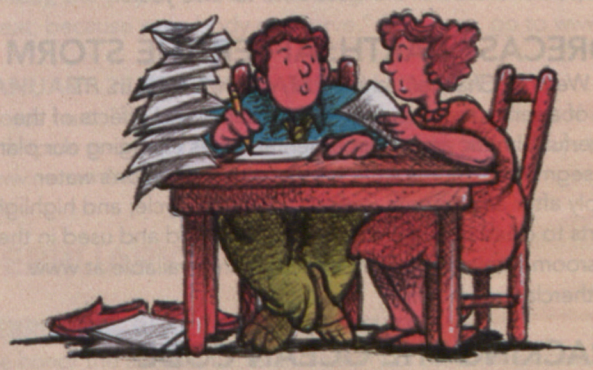

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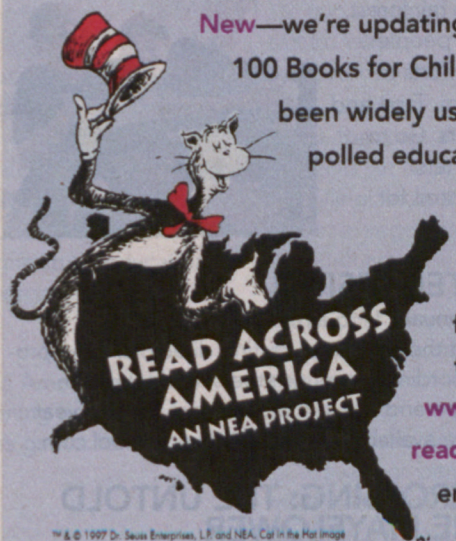
The Political Action Committee of the National Education Association

RESOLVE TO READ!

Make your New Year's resolution a reading one. Help NEA's Read Across America celebrate its 10th anniversary on March 2 by planning your most creative celebrations. Get teens involved by setting up poetry slams and reading marathons, organize a school library fund-raising drive, or dream up a challenge for the record books. Who knows—maybe your resolution will be chosen for the weekly Blue Pledge Special, showcasing our favorite pledges online. Go to **www.nea.org/readacross/** and make your pledge. You'll also find resources to help you locate celebrity readers plus books for your event.



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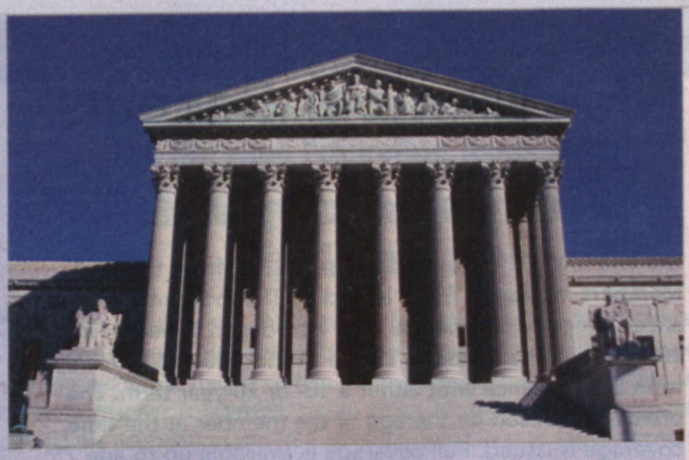
New—we're updating "Educators' Top 100 Books for Children." This list has been widely used since we first polled educators. Now help us update it—add your favorite books for children and teens! Go to **www.nea.org/readacross**. Polling ends January 31.

ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES

On TV

THE SUPREME COURT

PBS, January 31 & February 7, 9 p.m. ET. Check local listings.
Divided into four one-hour segments, this series is the first to fully profile the inner workings of the highest court in the land. Each installment takes an in-depth look at the "court of last resort," where nine judges appointed for life make monumental decisions that govern our everyday lives—from who's in the newspaper to what we can legally do in the privacy of our own homes. Using archival footage and innovative graphic techniques to help viewers grasp complex legal concepts, the series charts the Court's unique evolution and elucidates the shifting yet delicate balance between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the federal government. Numerous accounts highlight the complex and explosive collisions between the Court and the presidency. In-depth interviews with Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. and Retired Justice Sandra Day O'Connor help to humanize the enigmatic black-robed figures. Don't miss the dramatic stories of cases that have come before the Court, and the often controversial rulings that impact us all.



ELEMENTS OF PHYSICS: MOTION, FORCE, AND GRAVITY

Discovery Channel, January 11, 5 a.m. ET/PT.
This show investigates Newton's laws of motion and Einstein's definition of force. Can be taped and used in the classroom for one year. Teaching materials are at www.discoveryschool.com.

BIOGRAPHY—ERNEST HEMINGWAY: WRESTLING WITH LIFE

A&E, January 11–12, 4 a.m. ET/PT.
This two-part program explores the life and work of the legendary author. Can be taped and used in the classroom for two years. Teaching materials are available at www.aetv.com/class.

NICK NEWS WITH LINDA ELLERBEE—ROLLIN' DOWN THE RIVER: KIDS EXPLORE THE AMAZON

Nickelodeon, January 17, 6 a.m. ET/PT.
Discover the Amazon rainforest, including indigenous peoples, plants, wildlife, and efforts to preserve its ecosystem. Tape and use in class for 10 years. Go to www.nickjr.com/teachers/lesson_plans/index.jhtml for teaching materials.

CAREERS IN TELEVISION

Discovery Channel, January 17, 5 a.m. ET/PT.
This program looks at the careers of casting directors, news producers, contestant coordinators, puppeteers, and television-music composers. Tape and use in the classroom for one year. Teaching materials are available at www.discoveryschool.com.

DESPERATE CROSSING: THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE MAYFLOWER

History Channel, January 22–23, 6 a.m. ET/PT.
This two-part program chronicles the story behind the established history of the Puritans in the Old and New Worlds. Can be taped and used in the classroom for two years.

FORECAST EARTH: AFTER THE STORM

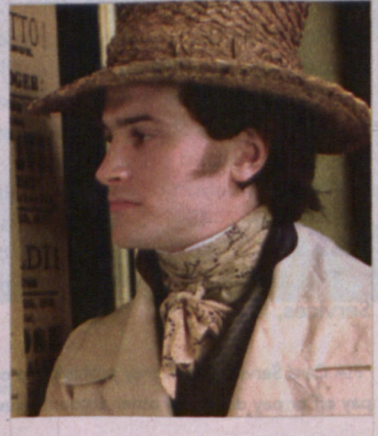
The Weather Channel, January 27, 4 a.m. ET/1 a.m. PT.
Part of a series that focuses on the causes and effects of the powerful climatic and environmental forces changing our planet, this segment explores what happens to the nation's water supply after a rainstorm; looks at the water cycle; and highlights efforts to clean up watersheds. Can be taped and used in the classroom forever. Teaching materials are available at www.weatherclassroom.com.

CRACKING THE OCEAN CODE

Discovery Channel, January 29, 5 a.m. ET/ PT.
Explore the ocean in search of new lifeforms and genetic secrets that might help solve the planet's most urgent energy and climate challenges. Can be taped and used in the classroom for one year.

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN: MY LIFE AS A FAIRY TALE

Hallmark Channel
January 29 & February 5, 3 a.m. ET/PT.
Featuring re-creations of characters from both Andersen's life and classic tales, this 2001 two-part presentation profiles the beloved children's author of such classics as *The Little Mermaid.* Tape and use in the classroom for one year. Teaching materials are at www.hallmarkchannel.com.



On TV listings are provided by KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., www.kidsnet.org, and Cable in the Classroom's Access Learning *magazine at www.ciconline.org.*

PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: DON PERDUE ©THIRTEEN/WNET NEW YORK; HALLMARK; LUCKY DUCK PRODUCTIONS

DIVERSITY CALENDAR

JANUARY

JANUARY—NATIONAL MENTORING MONTH
Sponsored by the Harvard Mentoring Project, this observance encourages volunteer mentors to help young people from underprivileged backgrounds reach their full potential. For more information, visit www.hsph.harvard.edu/chc/wmy2007/index.html.

JANUARY—NATIONAL BLOOD DONOR MONTH
Each day, 38,000 units of blood are needed in hospitals and emergency facilities. Go to www.givelife.org to find a blood drive near you.

JANUARY 8—COMING OF AGE DAY, JAPAN
In Japan, young adults who have turned 20 celebrate their coming of age on the second Monday in January. On this national holiday—*Seijin no hi*—celebrants and their families visit local shrines in their best clothes and listen to sound advice from elders.

JANUARY 15—MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY/DAY OF SERVICE
Reverend King was born in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1929. A recent addition to this federal holiday, the Day of Service encourages citizens to follow his words: "Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve." For more, go to www.mlkday.org.

JANUARY 22–26—NO NAME-CALLING WEEK
Words hurt. This week is aimed at ending name-calling of all kinds and providing schools with tools and inspiration to launch dialogues about ways to eliminate bullying. Go to www.nonamecallingweek.org.

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY—BLACK HISTORY MONTH
We honor the achievements and history of Black Americans during this observance, which began in the 1920s as Negro History Week before becoming a month-long event in 1976.

FEBRUARY—LIBRARY LOVERS' MONTH
During this month, we celebrate libraries of all types and work to ensure that they will continue to serve. For more information, go to www.librarysupport.net/librarylovers.

FEBRUARY 4 & 5—AFRICAN-AMERICAN READ-IN
Join over a million readers in this event, sponsored by the Black Caucus of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Visit www.ncte.org/prog/readin/107901.htm for more information.

FEBRUARY 17–24—NATIONAL FUTURE FARMERS OF AMERICA WEEK
The mission of FFA is to make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for leadership, growth, and career success through agricultural education. Go to www.ffa.org to find out more about this half-million-member organization.

FEBRUARY 18—LUNAR NEW YEAR
This festival is celebrated in many Asian countries and by many Asian Americans here in the United States. This is the Year of the Pig. People prepare by cleaning house, buying presents, and eating special foods. On New Year's Eve, some families gather to feast and watch fireworks at midnight.

FEBRUARY 20—FREDERICK DOUGLASS DAY
An abolitionist, lecturer, and writer, Douglass escaped slavery and became an advisor to President Lincoln. For more, see www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4p1539.html.

Diversity Recipe

LETTUCE WRAPS

Lettuce wraps are now popular in the United States, but in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, wrapping lettuce around minced meat has been a tradition for centuries. Here's a recipe to make for the Lunar New Year. You can cook the filling at home and reheat in a microwave. Let students assemble their own—that's half the fun. Makes 16 wraps.

Spicy Sauce Ingredients
3 Tbsp light brown sugar, packed
1/4 cups Asian fish sauce*
3 Tbsp fresh lime juice
1/4 tsp dried red pepper flakes
1 clove garlic, minced

Filling Ingredients
1 lb ground beef
1 Tbsp vegetable oil
1 red onion, minced
1 clove garlic, minced
1 Tbsp minced fresh ginger
1/2 tsp dried red pepper flakes
2 green onions, sliced thinly
1 carrot, peeled and chopped
1 zucchini, peeled and chopped
2 Tbsp Asian fish sauce*
1 Tbsp soy sauce
1 Tbsp sesame oil
1/4 cup chopped cilantro
salt (to taste)
16 Boston or Bibb lettuce leaves, washed

Whisk together all spicy sauce ingredients and set aside.

Filling: Saute the onion, garlic, and ginger in vegetable oil for three minutes. Add ground beef, stirring to break up, until fully cooked (about 5 minutes). Add red pepper flakes, green onions, carrot, and zucchini. Saute 2 minutes. Drain grease and remove from heat. Add fish sauce, soy sauce, sesame oil, and cilantro, and toss. Taste and add salt if necessary.

Have each person spoon 1-2 Tbsp of meat into a lettuce leaf. Drizzle with a little of the spicy sauce, roll up, and enjoy.

**Check the international food aisle at your supermarket.*

On the Web

SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS ARE MADE ON

Teachers and students of Shakespeare will find the Folger Shakespeare Library Web site a fascinating place to explore the Bard's life and works. Located in Washington, D.C., the Folger is a research center and home to the world's largest collection of Shakespeare materials and other rare books, manuscripts, and works of art. A portion of their collection is online, plus biographical information about Shakespeare and resources such as lesson plans, study guides, and suggestions on how to read Elizabethan English. Go to **www.folger.edu/index.cfm**.

YOUTH CAN CHANGE THE WORLD

The Innovation Center for Community & Youth Development explores the link between civic activism and youth development. The Web site offers tools and resources to explore how young people can strengthen society when they are engaged in important issues and involved in significant ways in creating change. Go to **www.theinnovationcenter.org**.

CORAL REEF TEACHING TOOL

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) have unveiled the Coral Ecosystem SciGuide, a tool to help educators understand and teach about the coral animal; the complexity and fragility of coral reefs; and the importance of protecting these ecosystems for future generations. Every Web resource is aligned with education standards, and provides access to lesson plans, activities, and computer simulations. The guide is available for $5.95 and includes access to the guide and resources for one year. Go to **http://sciguides.nsta.org/**.

GO ON A VIRTUAL DIG

If you dream of taking your students on an archaeological dig, the Crow Canyon Archaeological Center offers lesson plans based on actual research conducted at its Colorado facility, dedicated to understanding and teaching about the Anasazi Indians. Some of the materials are for purchase, but most can be downloaded for free and are developed for middle and high school students. Go to **www.crowcanyon.org/education/study_guides_lesson_plans.asp**.

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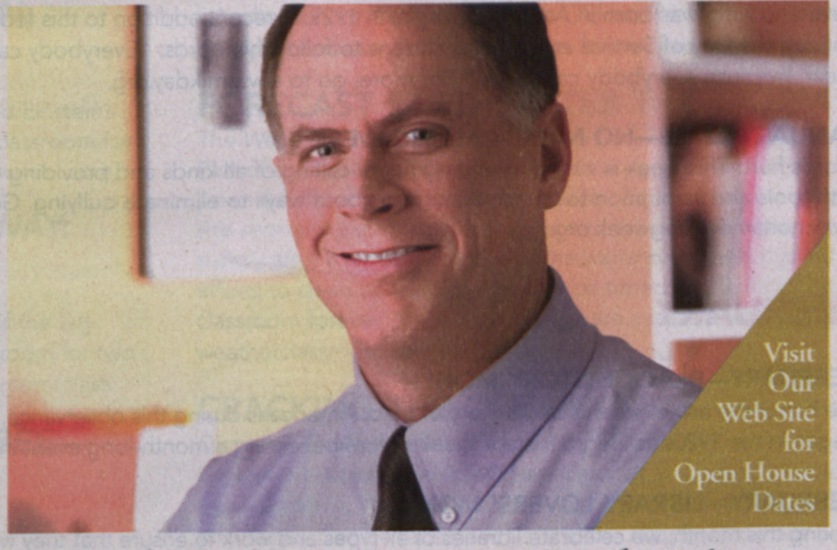

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What's in a Label?

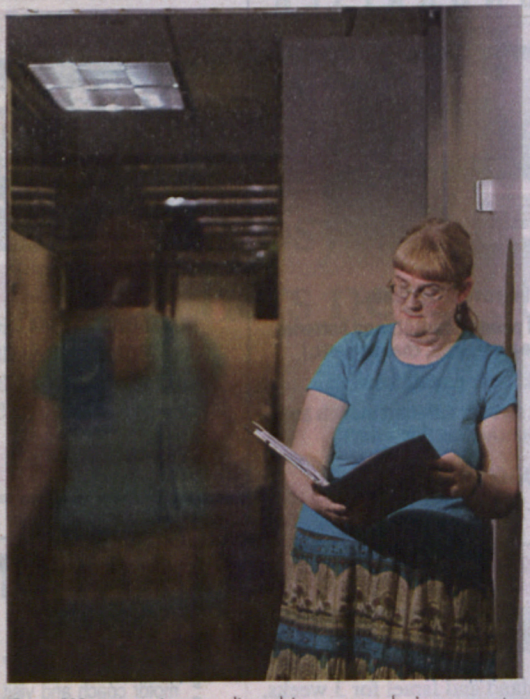
How NCLB hurts teacher quality at my school.

BY FAYE WAGONER

Attracting and retaining accomplished teachers for hard-to-staff schools is one of the toughest problems we face, and it is getting worse.

I teach in such a school. I have worked there for 16 years. Only one teacher, one counselor, and one support staffer have been there longer. We have been a high-needs school (25 percent special needs, 25 percent ESOL, 40 percent students of color) the whole time, but we only recently became hard-to-staff.

Everyone benefits from new blood, but too much blood loss can lead to organ failure. Our turnover rate has risen to about 20 percent. In addition to meeting our other challenges, we now have to incorporate large numbers of inexperienced teachers into our programs. This involves all kinds of mentoring and professional development that adds significantly to the work of the staff who stayed.



Faye Wagoner is spending this year exploring ways to keep accomplished teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

Our school has many strengths. We have always seen our diversity as a strength, building on it to create a positive learning community that stresses what we have in common while valuing our differences. Staff members are aware of our students' many learning styles and backgrounds. Pre- and post-tests show that they make great gains during the two years we work with them.

"OUR STUDENTS DO make good progress, but a significant number don't pass the test and are labeled failures."

They are in teams so they have a small school experience with teachers who know them well. Teachers extend themselves to their students to make them feel cared for. In 32 years of teaching, this is the hardest-working staff I have ever been a part of.

But turnover at our school is rising and it has become harder to attract capable, experienced teachers. There are few financial incentives. Teachers in less challenging schools receive the same pay as we do.

Many of the extras in our schools are provided by local PTAs. Our PTA cannot afford the computers and other material that PTAs at nearby schools buy. Also, students in the top 5 percent are skimmed off to a gifted center that offers them a special program (and keeps their special test scores).

But these problems have existed for a long time, and we managed to cope. The new burdens, which are finally eroding our strength, are due to the high-stakes testing required by No Child Left Behind and the bad publicity it led to. With the ever-increasing NCLB pass requirements, many other schools will soon be joining us.

These tests are difficult for our children. We struggle to build vocabulary and provide learning experiences that put words into a context that makes sense. Our students do make good progress, but a significant number don't pass the test and are labeled failures. For many, this is the third or fourth year in a row. We spend a lot of time trying to convince them they are smart and can succeed. Then the results come out and, despite their progress, they are failures again. How long would most adults put up with a similar situation before they gave up?

When the results are published, the "failure" label discourages skilled teachers from joining us.

Meanwhile, administrators, trying to boost scores, resort to prescribing the details of how we teach, rather than trusting in the good judgment of our highly skilled staff. That leads experienced teachers to leave for positions where they will be treated like professionals.

It doesn't have to be that way. I believe there are ways to create a wonderful learning community in a school that has many needs and great diversity. Here's what I believe it would take:

THERE SHOULD BE real, not token, financial incentives for working in a very challenging setting. Incentives on the order of $10,000 a year would have a significant impact on the decisions of experienced teachers, many of whom have families to support.

STUDENTS SHOULD BE evaluated using multiple assessments so their strengths become as apparent as their weaknesses.

NEW TEACHERS SHOULD have a strong induction program that gives mentors release time and allows new teachers observation time to learn effective strategies.

FINALLY, TEACHERS SHOULD be treated as professionals, trusted to exercise their judgment, and given time to collaborate in tailoring their efforts to open the doors of learning to every child.

Faye Wagoner, a seventh-grade English National Board Certified Teacher, is spending this year at NEA headquarters working on ways to improve teacher quality at hard-to-staff schools.

PHOTO: ERIN MARIE PHOTOGRAPHY

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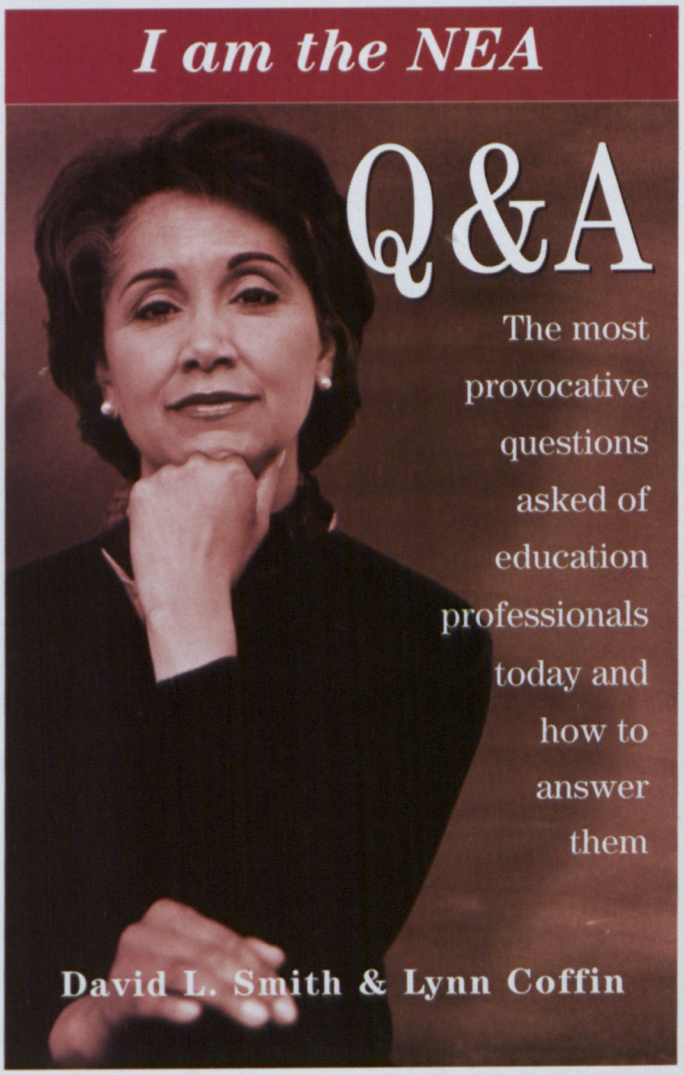
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▲We may prohibit use of this account to pay off or pay down any account issued by FIA Card Services, N.A.

*Upon approval, we will establish your credit line between $3,000 and $25,000 based on creditworthiness.

§This account offers a 4-month payment deferral feature if you take an advance within the first four months. During the deferral period, no payment will be due. Finance charges will accrue. Your repayment term will start after the deferral period. You may pre-pay at any time without penalty.

The NEA is not involved in the credit application process. All applications are subject to a confidential standard review by FIA Card Services, N.A. This account is issued and administered by FIA Card Services, N.A.

Absolutely no membership dues are used to market this program.

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The NEA Personal Loan program has been developed for NEA members and their families only. If a member decides not to renew membership, that person and his/her family will no longer be eligible to receive the preferred rates and fees offered through the NEA Personal Loan Program. If eligible, a replacement loan may be offered.

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